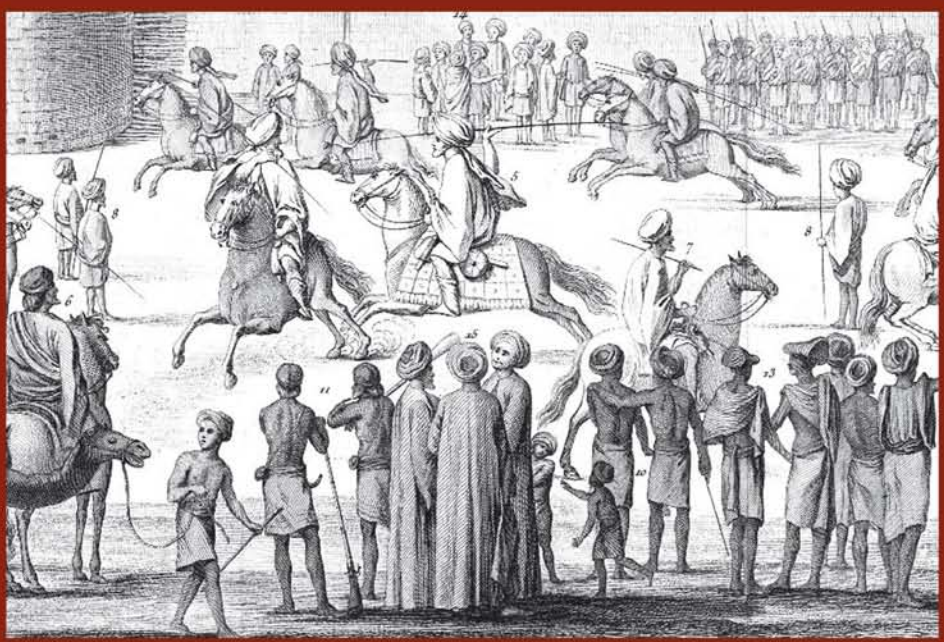
Like Joseph in Beauty

YEMENI VERNACULAR POETRY AND ARAB-JEWISH SYMBIOSIS



BY

MARK S. WAGNER

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VOLUME XXXIII

Like Joseph in Beauty

Yemeni Vernacular Poetry and Arab-Jewish Symbiosis

by

Mark S. Wagner

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2009

Cover illustration: detail from Carsten Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Copenhagen, 1772)

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wagner, Mark S.
Like Joseph in beauty : Yemeni vernacular poetry and Arab-Jewish symbiosis / by Mark S. Wagner.
p. cm. — (Brill studies in Middle Eastern literatures ; vol. 34)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-16840-4 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Arabic poetry—Yemen (Republic)—History and criticism. 2. Arabic poetry—Jewish authors—History and criticism. 3. Jewish religious poetry, Arabic—Yemen—History and criticism. I. Title.
PJ8007.2.W34 2008
892.7'1099533—dc22

2008035393

ISSN 1571-5183
ISBN 978 90 04 16840 4

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

For Melissa

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people in the United States and abroad have helped me write this book. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the faculty members at New York University who served on my dissertation committee: Bernard Haykel, Marion Holmes Katz, Philip Kennedy and Everett Rowson, as well as Raymond P. Scheindlin from the Jewish Theological Seminary. I would also like to thank Afrāḥ Saʿd Yusr for the time she spent with me puzzling over archaic Ṣanʿānī expressions, providing fascinating ethnographic details in the process. Diana Dunkelberger helped a great deal with the text of the book. Others I would like to thank include Yosef Tobi, Hartley Lachter, Tova Weitzman, Zayd al-Wazīr, and Nizār Ghānim.

I conducted research in Yemen in 2000 with the support of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies. I received a Vatican Film Library Mellon Fellowship in 2002. The National Foundation for Jewish Culture's Lucius N. Littauer Fellowship generously supported my research in 2003–2004, for which I am grateful. Lastly, I would like to thank the Goettingen State and University Library for permission to reproduce an image of Muslims and Jews in Ṣanʿāʾ from Carsten Niebuhr's 1772 *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Goettingen, 4 H AS I, 5443).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Afraḥ Saʿd Yusr: personal communication.
AR	ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Abī l-Rijāl's edition of the *dīwān* of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī, based on the MS of Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Manṣūr (Ṣanʿāʾ: Wizārat al-ashghāl al-ʿāmmah, 1971).
B	Peter Behnstedt, *Die nordjemenitischen Dialekte* (Weisbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992).
BL OIOC	British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection.
HH	Sālim al-Shabazī, *Ḥafets ḥayim: Shire rabenu shalem shabazi zatsʾl ha-mekhuneh aba shalem u-meshorere teman*, Yehudah Jizfān, Yehudah Manṣūrah, Yaḥyā al-Shaykh, and Shalom ʿAmram Qoraḥ, eds. (Jerusalem: He-Aḥim Yosef u-Shlomo Muqayṭon, 1968).
I	Muṭahhar ʿAlī al-Iryānī, *al-Muʿjam al-yamanī fī l-lughah wa l-turāth, ḥawl mufradāt khāṣṣah min al-lahajāt al-yamaniyyah*, (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿilmiyyah, 1996).
L	Carlo Landberg, *Glossaire Daṭīnois* (Leiden, Brill, 1942).
P	Moshe Piamenta, *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990–1991).
ST	Sālim al-Shabazī, *Shirim ḥadashim le-rabi shalem shabazi*, ed. Shalom Seri and Yosef Tobi (Jerusalem: Ben Tsvi Institute, 1975).
T	Tova Weitzman: personal communication.
Z	Zayd b. ʿAlī al-Wazīr: personal communication.

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

In transliterating classical Arabic, I have used the conventions of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* with two exceptions: "ah" indicates a *fatḥa* followed by a *tā marbūṭah*; and, where the initial "a" in the Arabic definite article elides, I have written only "l." In translating Ṣanʿānī Arabic, I have adopted Serjeant and Lewcock's transliteration system. I attempt to render the pronunciation of most words faithfully unless this would interfere with the recognition of the Arabic root. For example, while a *qāf* would invariably be pronounced *gāf* in the north of Yemen, I have written "q." Likewise, whereas speakers of Ṣanʿānī Arabic hardly differentiate between *dhāl, ḍād*, and *ẓāʾ*, I have indicated these letters using the standard "dh," "ḍ," and "ẓ." For purposes of clarity, I have classicized the "e" and "o" vowel sounds of Yemeni Arabic to conform to the conventional *ḍamma, fatḥa*, and *kasra*. Exceptions to this convention will be found in the poems of Rabbi Sālim al-Shabazī. In transliterating Hebrew, I have adopted the system outlined in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

Many of the poems in this book, particularly those of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī, are written in an antiquated dialect and come from flawed and unpointed manuscripts. In preparing my translations, I have relied on these original sources to the greatest extent possible. While Moshe Piamenta's invaluable *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic* has been my main route of access to these sources, I have also consulted Muṭahhar ʿAlī al-Iryānī's *al-Muʿjam al-yamanī fī l-lughah wa l-turāth, ḥawl mufradāt khāṣṣah min al-lahajāt al-yamaniyyah* and Peter Behnstedt's *Die nordjemenitischen Dialekte* wherever possible. I have used Count Carlo de Landberg's dictionary, the *Glossaire Daṭînois*. I have also referred to classical Arabic dictionaries. In cases where an Arabic word means one thing in the dialect and another in *fuṣḥā*, I have tried to cite its dialectical meaning. My translations aim for accuracy over beauty.

INTRODUCTION

The story of *ḥumaynī* poetry is, at first blush, the history of a genre of Arabic literature. Muslim Arabs began composing *ḥumaynī* poetry in fourteenth-century Yemen. Often consisting of strophic love poems set to music, *ḥumaynī* poetry was written in a mixture of classical Arabic and Yemeni dialects of Arabic. However, in the seventeenth century, the story of *ḥumaynī* poetry acquired an intercultural dimension. As Yemeni Jews began to reinterpret these poems and write their own, the story of *ḥumaynī* poetry became a story of the interrelationship between Arab and Jewish cultures. Accordingly, this book not only chronicles the origins and development of a genre of Arabic literature, it also tracks the ways in which this genre has influenced Jewish literature and has bound together Arabic and Jewish traditions of poetry and song.

The historical origins, status, and prosody of *ḥumaynī* poetry in Yemen are mysteries, as shown by an entry in a biographical dictionary by Muḥammad al-ʿZabārah (d. 1961). In this dictionary on prominent Yemeni men of the nineteenth century Zabārah discusses an extraordinarily inquisitive man called Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jiblī (d. 1880/1881). To illustrate his point about al-Jiblī's wide-ranging interests and fascination with the world, Zabārah reproduces a letter that al-Jiblī wrote to a contemporary of his.[1]

In this letter, al-Jiblī quotes a rather unremarkable couplet from a *ḥumaynī* poem in praise of his hometown, Jiblah: "Rest your heart among the little hills of Dhī l-Sufāl, gaze upon its expanses, / There the air is as clear as a crystal, the water is pure, and night brings even greater happiness." Al-Jiblī then writes:

> Given [the relevance of this poem's] contents I would have produced [this entire poem] were it not for your high station. I wonder why the word "*ḥumaynī*" was so named, which of the known meters it employed, whether they were among those enumerated by al-Khalīl, what era produced this new form and who was responsible for its first appearance.

[1] Muḥammad Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar min tarājim rijāl al-yaman fī l-qarn al-thālith ʿashar* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, n.d.), 1:87.

> In [these matters] this poor writer's pen gallops off, digressing from the *ḥumaynī* verses he has quoted, diverting you [readers] from amusement to [my] recollection of similar [mysterious] matters.[2]

This passage raises a number of important points about Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry. In the first place, al-Jiblī's apology suggests that *ḥumaynī* poetry, like other genres of Arabic literature that used Arabic dialects, was considered slightly distasteful. Secondly, the series of questions he asks remain pertinent: What is the etymology of the word "*ḥumaynī*"? Are its meters those of classical Arabic (*Khalīlian*) prosody? When did the genre develop? Who was its first practitioner? Indeed, despite the advances made in scholarship on Arabic literature, the mysteries of *ḥumaynī* poetry that this nineteenth-century Arab writer describes remain unsolved.

On the one hand, Arab and Western scholarship has neglected *ḥumaynī* poetry for a number of reasons. Foremost among these was a pragmatic concern: the manuscript sources necessary to the study of Yemeni literature were almost inaccessible until the 1970s. In addition, these scholars have viewed with some skepticism Arabic literature composed during the so-called Age of Decline (*ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*) between the heyday of classical Arabic literature under the ʿAbbasids and the nineteenth-century Renaissance (*Nahḍah*) of Arabic letters. Both Arab and Western scholars have generally given short shrift to Arabic literature composed in the vernacular.[3] In recent decades, however, scholarship on post-classical vernacular literature has expanded dramatically.

Jewish studies scholarship, on the other hand, has focused on Yemeni poetic traditions since the nineteenth century, when the Lithuanian-Jerusalemite Rabbi Yaʿakov Sapir published a popular Hebrew travelogue that generated an intense interest in Yemen among European Jews. In this travelogue, R. Sapir describes seeing manuscripts and hearing the performance of Rabbi Sālim al-Shabazī's *ḥumaynī* poetry while in Yemen in 1858. Motivated by the success of R. Sapir's travelogue, book dealers began buying Yemeni manuscripts that contained Jewish

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[2] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:89; Zabārah, *Āʾimmat al-yaman*, (Cairo: al-Maṭābiʿ al-salafiyyah wa-maktabatuhā, 1955/6), 371; Muḥammad ʿAbduh Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1987), 51.

[3] A survey of the scholarly literature on Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry can be found in Mark Wagner, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* Verse: Language and Meaning in the Arab and Jewish Vernacular Poetry of Yemen" (PhD diss., New York University, 2004), 8–16.

ḥumaynī poems.[4] Today, these manuscripts can still be found in libraries in Germany, Britain, Russia, and the United States. Presses in Jerusalem and British-administered Aden printed anthologies of this poetry, some of which found its way to European Jewish scholars.

Yemeni Jews and their poetry evoked a range of strong emotional and intellectual responses from *fin de siècle* European Jews. Accounts of the poverty of Yemeni Jews stimulated philanthropy.[5] The idea emerged that Yemeni Jewry, isolated for centuries from the main institutions of Jewish religion and culture, preserved aspects of primeval Judaism. Generations of scholars eager to add these recently discovered sources to the burgeoning field of Rabbinics mined Yemeni Jewish collections of midrashim and masoretic traditions. Scholars found that many individual poems, and even entire poetic collections, by the great Hebrew poets of Muslim Spain, were preserved only in Yemeni manuscripts.[6]

A.Z. Idelsohn, who in 1910 and 1911 recorded the songs of Yemeni Jews in Jerusalem as part of what would later become his mammoth *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies*, sought in Yemeni Jewish song the musical traditions of ancient Israel.[7] Thus, Yosef Tobi considers him the founder of the "romantic school in the study of Yemenite Jewry."[8] A Jewish archaeologist named Eduard Glaser, after pondering the fact that Yemen's aristocracy converted to Judaism in the sixth century, advocated making Yemen the Jewish national home. Theodore Herzl found this suggestion so distasteful that he nearly challenged Glaser to a duel.[9]

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[4] Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden* (1902; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), 259.

[5] Tudor Parfitt, *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of Yemen 1900–1950* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 31–32; Wilhelm Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie der Juden Jemens* (Budapest: Adolf Alkalay and son, 1910), 4n1.

[6] Yosef Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen: Studies in Their History and Culture* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 270–271; Tobi, "Beyn shirat teman le-shirat sefarad," in *Yahadut teman: Pirke meḥkar ve-ʿiyun*, ed. Yosef Tobi and Yisrael Yeshayahu, (Jerusalem: Ben Tsvi Institute, 1975), 306–308.

[7] Many of the earliest recordings of Yemeni music were destroyed during WWII. Idelsohn's recordings, housed in the Phonogram-Archiv der Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaft in Vienna, did not survive the war. Paul F. Marks, *Bibliography of Literature Concerning Yemenite-Jewish Music*, Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography 27 (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1973), 49. With the fall of Berlin, the Red Army stationed troops in the Odeon factory, where the company's record collection (including many recordings by Yemeni singers) was used for target practice.

[8] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 273.

[9] Glaser (1855–1908) spent years in Yemen in the 1880s conducting astronomical and archaeological research. Fluent in Arabic, he traveled about the Jawf in the guise

Even Albert Einstein argued the importance of Yemen for world Jewry. Berakhah Zephira,[10] a musician and composer of Yemeni ancestry who became an important shaper of the musical culture of the Jewish community of Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s, recalled performing for Einstein in his home in Berlin in 1930. She sang a series of Yemeni Jewish songs, which apparently sounded quite strange to Einstein's guest, filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. "Eisenstein gave me a funny look" (*hebiṭ bi be-zarut*) writes Zephira. This "funny look" prompted Einstein to explain to him "the significance of Yemeni Jewry" (*mashmaʿut yahadut teman*).[11] Though it sounds alien and Arabic, Einstein seems to say, you are hearing the music of our ancient ancestors.

The putative preservation of ancient textual traditions was not the sole source of European Jewish interest in Yemeni Jews. Their traditions were also fascinating in and of themselves. This was especially true for socialist-Zionist settlers in Palestine. Yemeni Jews had already begun emigrating there in large numbers in the 1880s, before other Oriental Jewish communities. As a result, the 1880s literature of the First Aliyah is full of Yemeni characters.[12] These writers generated a range of responses to Yemeni Jews: some identified with them as long lost relatives, others revered their ancient traditions, and still others felt consternation at the seeming incompatibility of their religious beliefs or attitudes with the vision of the "New Jew".

How could Zionist scholars in Palestine reject the forms of thought and social arrangements believed to characterize Exile while simultaneously becoming entranced by Yemeni Jewish culture? In his study of the Jerusalem school of Jewish studies, David Myers demonstrates that the Zionist rhetoric of the "negation of the Diaspora" (*shlilat ha-golah*) does not account for the attitudes of Zionist scholars towards Jewish

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of a Muslim *faqīh*, was eventually unmasked, and escaped by the skin of his teeth. According to Goitein, Glaser thought that the plan to make Yemen a refuge for Jews would solve the Jewish Question while preserving both Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian ambitions in the Middle East, whereas the Zionist settlement of Palestine served British interests. S.D. Goitein, "Mi hayah eduard glazer," in *Shvut Teman*, ed. Yisrael Yeshayahu and Aharon Tsadok (Tel Aviv: Hotsʾat "mi-teman le-tsiyon," 1945), 154; Yosef Tsurieli, "Hertsl ve-tokhnit glazer li-medinah yehudit bi-teman," in *Peʿamim* 65 (1995): 57–76.

[10] Her surname should be transliterated "*Tsafirah*" but on her recordings Zephira, Zefira, and Zfira are used.

[11] Berakhah Zephira, *Kolot Rabim* (Jerusalem: Masada, 1978), 17.

[12] Yafah Berlovits, "Dmut ha-temani bi-sifrut ha-ʿaliyot ha-rishonot, ʿal rekaʿ ha-mifgash ha-veyn ʿedati," in *Peʿamim* 10 (1981): 77.

civilization in the Diaspora.[13] Myers' insight holds true for scholarship on Yemeni Jewry. For example, David Yellin, a professor of medieval Hebrew poetry of the Spanish period at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wrote an article on the poetry of the Yemeni Jews in 1897 in which he makes an impassioned plea for its study.[14]

Yellin's call was heard in Hungary, where Wilhelm Bacher undertook the first comprehensive study of Jewish Yemeni poetry. Entitled *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie der Juden Jemens*, this study in many ways remains unsurpassed. In it, Bacher intuits that the distinguishing characteristics Jewish Yemeni poetry acquired in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be traced to parallel developments in Yemeni Muslim poetry. However, given the lack of available Yemeni Muslim sources at the time and place in which he was writing, he was unable to prove this. In general, Bacher was greatly impressed by the thorough intermingling of Arabic and Hebrew in Yemeni Jewish literature, and the intimate cultural contacts between Arabs and Jews that this linguistic evidence implied.

The study of Yemeni Jewry was also one of the many passions of Shlomo Dov (Fritz) Goitein, an Islamicist and Hebraist best known for his work on the Cairo Genizah. Living among members of the community in Jerusalem and traveling to Aden on behalf of the Jewish Agency, Goitein had a hands-on engagement with Yemeni Jewry. But Goitein's view of Yemeni Jews, like that of the writers of the First Aliyah, was a paradoxical one. On the one hand, he worked in the "romantic school" of Idelsohn, struggling to preserve every nuance of Yemeni Jews' pronunciation of Hebrew in the belief that it reflected the language of ancient Israel. In 1945, he said that Yemeni Jews were "the most Jewish of all of the Jewish communities," their spoken language was "perhaps the purest Semitic language in existence today," and that Yemen was "the fortress of pure Semitism (*mivtsar ha-shemiyut ha-ṭehorah*) as the great traveler Joseph Halévy dubbed it." He felt that the social life of Jews in Yemen gave them "a way of life similar to that of our forefathers in the Talmudic period." They were, all in all, "closest to our earliest

[13] David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 89, 131, 136–137, 177–185.

[14] David Yellin, "Ginze teman," in *Ha-Shiloaḥ*, 2 (1897): 147–161; Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 272.

forefathers."[15] On the other hand, Goitein also believed that the Jewish and Arab civilizations enriched each other in a symbiotic fashion: not only were Yemeni Jews the most Jewish of Jews, Yemeni Arabs were also among the most Arab of Arabs.[16]

Taken together, his ideas on this subject can be read in two ways. They may mean, in line with his statements of 1945, that the Jews and Arabs of Yemen are simply the most primitive—and therefore the most authentic—communities of their respective worlds. In keeping with his concept of Jewish-Arab symbiosis, Goitein also may have meant that Jews and Arabs in Yemen were somehow responsible for each other's cultural heritage. If the Jewish-Arab symbiosis had a geographical axis, surely this was Yemen. If Yemen was the original site of this mutual enrichment, Goitein optimistically saw the state of Israel as the locus of a new Jewish-Arab symbiosis. And he thought of Yemeni Jewish immigrants as the seasoned guides who would lead Palestinian Jews and Arabs into a new era of cooperation and creativity. The holy land of Jewish-Arab symbiosis, Yemen, was to be transferred to the Holy Land.

But here were two contradictions: in order to preserve the Jewish-Arab[17] symbiosis, Yemeni Jews had to leave the Arabs of Yemen. In order to perpetuate their primeval cultural heritage, they had to excise those aspects of it that were at odds with the dictates of progress.

These twin contradictions seem all the more glaring when one takes into account the decades of near total separation between Yemeni Jews

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[15] S.D. Goitein, "ʿAl erikh brauer z.l.," in *Shvut teman*, ed. Yisrael Yeshayahu and Aharon Tsadok, (Tel Aviv: Hotsʾat "mi-teman le-tsiyon," 1945), 93.

[16] Goitein, *Jews and Arabs* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 73.

[17] A word about terms: I use the terms "Yemeni Arab poetry" and "Yemeni Jewish poetry" out of convenience. Most Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry could not be described as "Muslim" in anything but the broadest sense because its content is lyrical or humorous. Therefore, one is left with "Arab." Since Yemeni Jews wrote much poetry in Arabic, their poetry cannot accurately be described as being in Hebrew (to be contrasted with Muslim Yemenis' Arabic). The term "Arab Jew" has little currency outside small academic and political circles and I have never come across any formulation remotely resembling it in the works of Yemeni Muslims or Yemeni Jews. Jewish writers in Yemen tended to call their non-Jewish neighbors "Ishmaelites" or, less often "Arabs." Muslim authors called Jews "Jews," "the people of the Pact" (*ahl al-dhimmah*), or, less often, "infidels" (*kuffār*). I have deliberately avoided the adjective "Yemenite" in that my intent is to treat both Jewish and non-Jewish poetry under the rubric of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Also, the term "Yemenite" strikes me as redolent of the idea that those to whom it refers to are carry-overs from the ancient world, like Amorites or Hittites, an attitude prevalent in much early twentieth-century scholarship on the Jews of Yemen (Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 268–269).

and Arabs since the Jews' mass emigration to Israel, and the trials the community faced adjusting to the social order of the new Israeli state. In addition, due to a variety of complex factors that will be addressed at length in Chapter Six, Yemeni Jews and their descendants in Israel have held ambivalent attitudes towards Arab culture in general, particularly insofar as it impacts their sacred poetry. Nevertheless, Yemeni Jewish scholars like Yehudah Ratzhaby and Yosef Tobi have played central roles in the reconstruction and renovation of Yemeni Jewish culture in Israel. In recent publications, Tobi has emphasized that the reconstruction of the culture of the Jews of Yemen necessitates familiarity with Yemeni Arab culture.[18]

If we look at Yemen as a locus of Jewish-Arab symbiosis, we must also ask what Jewish Yemeni poetry tells us about Arab *ḥumaynī* poetry. With one accidental exception, which I will discuss in Chapter Seven, no Yemeni Arab writers have asked this question. In general, topics connected to the Jewish presence in Yemen are seldom addressed by Arab writers, the vast majority of whom lack the familiarity with the languages and texts necessary to read works written by Yemeni Jews.[19] This neglect is unfortunate, considering that Jewish poets amplified and reinterpreted literary aspects of Muslim *ḥumaynī* poetry. In addition, Jewish commentators engaged in debates about the meaning of this poetry whose intensity was unmatched in Arab debates about their own works.

In my attempt to answer the many complex questions about Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry that al-Jiblī poses in his letter, I use a methodology that includes both historical and literary approaches. I admit that these two approaches often seem to be at odds with one another. One has

[18] Yosef Tobi, "Yediʿot ʿal yehude teman bi-ḥiburim ʿarviyim mi-teman," in *Peʿamim* 64 (1995): 68–102; *Peʿamim* 65 (1995): 18–56; Tobi, "Sifrut he-halakhah ha-zaydit ke-makor le-toldot yehude teman," in *Tema* 4 (1994): 93–118.

[19] Ahmad Dallal has argued that the onus for the fact that Jewish and Arab sources have not been integrated lies with Jewish scholars, who have not made sufficient use of Yemeni Arabic sources. Ahmad Dallal, "On Muslim Curiosity and the Historiography of the Jews of Yemen," in *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1.2 (1999). One wonders what led Professor Dallal, who apparently does not know Hebrew, to attempt a broad critique of scholarship on Yemeni Jewry, the overwhelming majority of which is written in Hebrew. Indeed, Tobi's articles that promoted the use of Arabic sources in scholarship on Yemeni Jewry render Dallal's point moot. Alas, he wrote them in Hebrew! See Isaac Hollander's comments on Dallal's argument in *Jews and Muslims in Lower Yemen: A Study in Protection and Restraint, 1918–1949* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005).

the sense that poems respond poorly to being treated as sources for historical change. This might be said to be particularly true of Arabic poems that relish conventional motifs and rhetorical flourishes over biographical or annalistic detail. After these poems grudgingly offer up their factuality, their unfortunate researchers may have the feeling that they could have reaped much greater yields from patently historical works or archival documents, as well as having ignored the poetry's poetry, so to speak. Ann Jefferson and David Robey, among others, have made this point.[20] Despite these pitfalls, a historical-literary approach is necessary to analyzing the historical development of this mysterious genre and to determining its distinctive qualities as literature.

In this book, I argue that the distinctive poetry of Yemeni Jews—the apex of Jewish literary creativity in Yemen—is a phenomenon intimately connected to Arab Yemeni poetry. I will also argue that the study of Yemeni Jewish poetry sheds light on Arab *ḥumaynī* poetry. This book seeks to transcend a model of cultural influence and borrowing, of originality and derivativeness, by showing how both Arab and Jewish communities grapple with the many issues posed by the genre of *ḥumaynī* poetry itself: its unique structure, linguistic heterogeneity, eroticism, musicality, and symbolism.

In preparing this book, I have consulted printed collections of classical Arabic, *ḥumaynī*, and Yemeni Jewish poetry written in classical Arabic, Ṣanʿānī Arabic, and Judeo-Yemeni. I have used manuscripts from the Western Mosque Library of the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ, the Waqf library in the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ, the Aḥqāf Library in Tarīm, the Vatican, and the British Library. I have used biographical dictionaries of Yemeni literary figures and, to a lesser extent, histories. Humorous *ḥumaynī* poems, particularly those of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī, posed considerable linguistic challenges. Where the existing dictionaries of Yemeni Arabic were unhelpful, I consulted native Yemenis, to whom I am incredibly grateful.

[20] Ann Jefferson and David Robey, *Modern Literary Theory: a Comparative Introduction* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), 1–12.

PART ONE

THE POETICS OF *ḤUMAYNĪ* VERSE

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING THE *ḤUMAYNĪ* POEM

Origins

The Arabic literary tradition is highly conservative in its presentation of itself. It tends to obscure the ripples that would precede major turning points, acknowledging them belatedly and grudgingly. In retrospect, innovations in the Arabic canon seem to spring forth fully-grown. Thus, the polythematic ode (*qaṣīdah*), the characteristic form of classical Arabic poetry until the modern era, was said to emerge "with Homeric suddenness" in sixth-century Arabia.[1] A raging controversy over rhetorical artifice centers on one ninth-century poet, Abū Tammām, even though earlier poets practiced it and the controversy itself arose after his death. It is similarly difficult to assess whether an individual innovator or a poetic critical mass led to the emergence of strophic poems in Islamic Spain.

In this light, one should not be entirely surprised to read a Yemeni writer of the seventeenth century matter-of-factly describe *ḥumaynī* poetry as the brainchild of the poet Aḥmad b. Falītah (d. 1332/1333). According to the historian ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, Ibn Falītah, who was a courtier and professional scribe in the Rasūlid court in Zabīd, left behind a two-volume collection of poetry. One of these volumes contained classical Arabic poems, and the other, his *ḥumaynī* poems and other non-inflected genres.

The earliest extant usage of the term "*ḥumaynī*" is in the entry on Ibn Falītah in a late fifteenth-century copy of al-Khazrajī's biographical dictionary, *Ṭirāz aʿlām al-zaman fī ṭabaqāt aʿyān al-yaman*. Ibn Falītah "had a lovely poetry collection (*dīwān*) that fit in two thick volumes," writes al-Khazrajī. "The first volume contained his Arabic poems which were arranged alphabetically and the second volume contained the non-Arabic poems such as the *ḥamaniyyāt*, the *sāḥiliyyāt*, the *bālbāl*

[1] James Montgomery, *The Vagaries of the Qasidah: the tradition and practice of early Arabic poetry* (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1997).

and the *duwayniyyāt*. . . ."[2] Al-Khazrajī goes on to say that a smaller version of Ibn Falītah's *dīwān* "comprised the seven kinds of his poetry which are the Arabic, the *dubaytāt*, the *ḥalāwa*, the *muwashshaḥāt*, the *bālbāl*, the *sāḥiliyyāt*, and the *ḥumayniyyāt*, including ten examples of each of these kinds."[3] In this second passage, al-Khazrajī vocalizes the term "*ḥumaynī*" in what would become the correct manner.[4]

The Rasūlid dynasty, established in Lower Yemen by runaway slave-soldiers (*mamlūk*s) of the Egyptian Ayyūbid dynasty, was distinguished by its cultural efflorescence. The Rasūlid monarchs took a keen interest in the sciences, both natural and Islamic. Zabīd and Taʿizz, their major cities, were adorned with lavish artwork and undergirded by sophisticated sewage systems. Aside from Ibn Falītah, literati like Muḥammad b. Ḥimyar[5] (d. 1253/1254), al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī b. Hutaymil[6] (d. 1296), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ashʿarī[7], ʿUmar b. ʿAlī al-ʿAlawī[8] (d. 1303/1304), and Ismāʿīl b. Abī Bakr al-Muqrī[9] (d. 1433/1434) graced

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[2] The copyist's misspelling of the word *ḥumaynī* as "*ḥamaniyyāt*" may point to the novelty of the term and his unfamiliarity with it. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *Ṭirāz aʿlām al-zaman fī ṭabaqāt aʿyān al-yaman* (BL OIOC 2425), 183r: "*. . . Wa-lahu dīwān shiʿrin mumtiʿin yadkhul fī mujalladayn ḍakhmayn fa l-mujallad al-awwal fī l-ʿarabiyyāt murattaban ʿalā ḥurūf al-muʿjam wa l-mujallad al-thānī fī-hā siwā l-ʿarabiyyāt min al-ḥamaniyyāt wa l-sāḥiliyyāt wa l-bālbāl wa l-dūbaytāt. . . .*"; Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: the British Museum, 1894), 1:454; Ḥusayn al-ʿAmrī, *Maṣādir al-turāth al-yamanī fī l-matḥaf al-bariṭānī* (Damascus: Dār al-Mukhtār li l-taʾlīf wa l-ṭibāʿah wa l-nashr, 1980), 59.

[3] Al-Khazrajī, *Ṭirāz aʿlām al-zaman*, 183r: "*. . . Jamaʿa fīhā sabʿah afānīn min shiʿrihi wa-hiya ʿarabī wa l-dūbaytāt wa-ḥalāwā wa-muwashshaḥāt wa l-bālbāl wa-sāḥiliyyāt wa-ḥumayniyyāt ḍamanahu min kull fann min hādhihi l-funūn ʿashr faṣāʾil. . . .*"

[4] The idea that there were "seven kinds of poetry" may have its origins in the "seven arts" of an earlier Arab poet, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī.

[5] His poetry, mainly panegyric, was printed as *Dīwān Abī ʿAbdallāh Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥimyar b. ʿUmar al-Wusābī al-Hamdānī* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1985).

[6] Ibn Hutaymil, *Dīwān Ibn Hutaymil: Durar al-Nuḥūr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Walī al-Shamīrī (Ṣanʿāʾ: Muʾassasat al-ibdāʿ li l-thaqāfah wa l-ādāb, 1997).

[7] Copies of his *adab* collection, *Kitāb lubb al-albāb wa-nuzhat al-aḥbāb fi l-adāb*, are held by the Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyyah and the Aḥqāf library in Tarim, Ḥaḍramawt. The *waqf* repository at the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ has an abridgement. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ruqayḥī, ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī and ʿAlī Wahhāb al-Ānisī, eds., *Fihrist makhṭūṭāt al-jāmiʿ al-kabīr* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Wizārat al-awqāf wa l-irshād) 1979, item number 1294.

[8] Parts of his seven-volume literary collection, *Muntakhab al-funūn al-jāmiʿ li l-maḥāsin wa l-ʿuyūn* have been preserved. According to ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, the Western mosque library has parts but I have not been able to find them listed in the catalogue.

[9] Much Rasūlid poetry is now available in print. Ibn al-Muqrī was a jurist, a poet and a foe of Sufism. Alexander Knysh, *Ibn Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*

the Rasūlid courts and chancery, producing secular poetry, *adab* works, and literary epistles.[10]

In light of the cultural continuity between Egyptian Ayyūbid and Yemeni Rasūlid courts, most scholars have plausibly concluded that Yemeni strophic poetry emerged through the influence of the strophic poetry of Muslim Spain.[11] A more fanciful hypothesis by the writer Aḥmad al-Shāmī holds that the southern Arab (Qaḥṭānī) tribes already preserved Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry at the time they aided in conquering the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century. Thus he suggests that *ḥumaynī* poetry fathered Andalusian strophic poetry, rather than the converse.[12]

In what way, if any, is Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry distinct from the tradition of strophic poetry that fanned out from Spain across the Arab world? In a recent overview of strophic poetry in the Arab world, the Syrian scholar Majd al-Afandī concludes that Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry differs in one crucial respect from the traditions of strophic poetry in the wider Arab world: whereas poets of the Levant and North Africa composed their works in classical Arabic, Yemeni poets composed theirs

(Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), Chapter 9. His *dīwān* was printed in Bombay in 1888 as *Majmūʿat al-qāḍī al-fāḍil sharaf al-dīn ismāʿīl bin abī bakr al-muqrī*. Ibn al-Muqrī wrote a treatise demonstrating his verbal pyrotechnics called *ʿUnwān al-sharaf al-wāfī fī l-fiqh wa l-naḥw wa l-taʾrīkh wa l-ʿarūḍ wa l-qawāfī* (Taʿizz: Maktabat Usāmah, 1987). It was ostensibly a treatise on law. By reading along the first letter of each line, the last letter of each line, or along one of two columns running down the middle of each page, the reader would find four additional treatises on prosody, the history of the Rasūlids, grammar, and rhyme. J.A. Dafari, (Jaʿfar ʿAbduh al-Ẓafārī), "Ḥumaini Poetry in South Arabia" (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 1966), 208–209. Judging by the title of a work of his listed by Brockelmann (Rieu, *Supplement*, 2:255), "*al-Ḥumayniyyāt al-badīʿah fi madḥ ʿilm al-sharīʿah*," he apparently wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry as well. Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 227n89. Ibn al-Muqrī is the subject of Ṭāhā Aḥmad Abū Zayd, *Ismāʿīl al-Muqrī: Ḥayātuhu wa-shiʿruhu* (Ṣanʿā': Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-buḥūth al-yamaniyyah, 1986).

[10] A full account of Rasūlid literature would have to take into account the substantial body of poetry and prose produced under the Ṣulayḥids, the Ismāʿīlī dynasty that was the Rasūlids' chief competitor in Lower Yemen. What Yemeni scholars portray as a Rasūlid cultural efflorescence *ex nihilo* may, in fact, represent a continuation of a creative process that began under the Ṣulayḥids.

[11] ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, *Ḥayāt al-adab al-yamanī fī ʿaṣr banī rasūl* (Ṣanʿā': Wizārat al-iʿlām wa l-thaqāfah, 1980), 143, 193.

[12] Al-Shāmī's theory of the antiquity of *ḥumaynī* poetry received a sympathetic hearing from R.B. Serjeant in the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 452, and from P, 108.

in the vernacular.[13] Afandī goes on to conclude that the Yemenis made the art of strophic poetry a "purely popular (*shaʿbī*) art."[14]

As Afandī suggests, while the initial stimulus for *ḥumaynī* poetry came from outside Yemen, the tradition developed its own regional flavor. The writer Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Maʿṣūm (d. 1705) notes this fact when he defines the difference between strophic poetry of Yemen and that of North Africa. He writes:

> The people of Yemen have a kind of poetry which they call *muwashshaḥ*, and which differs from the *muwashshaḥ* of the people of the Maghreb. The difference between them lies in that the *muwashshaḥ* of the people of the Maghreb preserves the desinential inflections (*iʿrāb*)…unlike that of the people of Yemen, in which the *iʿrāb* is totally omitted, and the incorrect, ungrammatical language (*al-laḥn*) is even sweeter in it, as in the *zajal*.[15]

In an 1811 literary anthology that he produced for English students of Arabic, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Shirwānī prefaces a *ḥumaynī* poem by writing:

> *Ḥumaynī* poetry is uninflected as will be seen in the preceding lines which are so delicate that they almost flow away. This is what the post-classical Arab literati (*al-muwalladūn min udabāʾ al-ʿarab*) like, especially the poets of Yemen who are the horsemen of this racecourse and its standard-bearers.[16]

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[13] While Andalusian writers of strophic poetry used local dialects, these genres were rapidly classicized as they were disseminated to other regions of the Arab world.

[14] Majd al-Afandī, *al-Muwashshaḥāt fī l-ʿaṣr al-ʿuthmānī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1999), 19.

[15] Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr*, ed., Aḥmad b. ʿAlī āl ʿAbdallah al-Thānī (Qaṭar: Maṭābiʿ ʿAlī b. ʿAlī al-Radhah 1962/1963), 243; Trans. David Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* Poetry in Yemen," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 11 (1988): 222. Al-Shirwānī made a similar statement in reference to the Yemeni poet Ḥaydar Āghā: "From among his delicate *muwashshaḥāt*, what impressed me was that which [was written] in the style of the people of Yemen. They disregard the case endings in this type of poetry. Indeed, ungrammatical language (*al-laḥn*) is intended. *Ḥadīqat al-afrāḥ li-izālat al-aṭrāḥ* (Cairo: Bulāq 1865/1866), 25–26.

[16] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Shirwānī, *Nafḥat al-yaman fī-mā yazūlu bi-dhikrihi al-shajan* (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-Maktabah al-yamaniyyah, 1985), 110. In the preface to the original 1811 edition, Professor Lumsden of Fort William College wrote: "I solicited and obtained from the General Council the liberty of employing the aid of a learned Arab, Shykh Ahmud, a native of Yumun [sic], who is now attached to the College est. Added to an extensive acquaintance with the Arabian poets, this man boasts, in his own person, of no inconsiderable talents for poetry; and some original pieces of his composition are published in the course of the following work."

Thus, Yemeni writers distinguish *ḥumaynī* poetry from the strophic styles of other Arab countries. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh b. al-Muṭahhar b. Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 1638/1639) shows an awareness of these regional differences when he describes a quatrain poem by his kinsman, the poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh writes:

> This is a style that is not loved by the poets of Yemen. It is loved by the people of Egypt and Syria. They have written so much of it that it has become an ugly thing. They take up the cause of weak themes, and sickly, drooping expressions.[17]

One major poet and patron of *ḥumaynī* poetry in the eighteenth century, Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ, quotes a strophic poem that he describes as having been written "according to the style of the people of the Levant" (*alāʾ ṭarīq ahl al-mashriq*).[18] Nevertheless, it is unclear how Yemenis knew about strophic poetry that was written elsewhere in the Arab world. Other than a solitary manuscript of an anthology that contains such poetry, Ibn Ḥijjah's *Khizānat al-adab*, the sources that would have contained examples of Levantine and Egyptian strophic poems seem not to be extant in Yemen.[19]

If *ḥumaynī* poetry sprang from the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ*, which tradition of strophic poetry influenced it: the classicized and secular poetry of the Ayyūbid courts, or the linguistically simple but theologically complex poetry of the Sufi master Ibn al-ʿArabī and his Syrian and North African imitators? The Yemeni scholar J.A. Dafari points to the Sufi *muwashshaḥāt* of Ibn ʿArabī, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), Shuʿayb b. Abī Madyan al-Tilimsānī (d. 1194), and al-Shushtarī (d. 1276), Abū Madyan's disciple, as the forebears of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry.[20]

Dafari also shows that the earliest Yemenī poets known to have composed *muwashshaḥāt* were the courtier ʿUmārah al-Ḥakamī and the Sufi Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān (d. 1266/1267). The fact that Ibn ʿAlwān's *muwashshaḥāt* were not inflected suggests that these were *ḥumaynī*

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[17] Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn* (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-Dār al-yamaniyyah li l-nashr wa l-tawzīʿ, 1987), 289.

[18] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ, *Azāhir al-muḥayyāʾ wa-ishrāq anwār adab al-ḍiyāʾ* (Codici Vaticani Arabici 965), 26r.

[19] Al-Ruqayḥī, al-Ḥibshī and al-Ānisī, eds., *Fihrist makhṭūṭāt al-jāmiʿ al-kabīr*, 4:1641.

[20] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 44.

poems.[21] Though Ibn Falītah is described as the first to write *ḥumaynī* verse, Dafari explains that one of his contemporaries, Imām al-Wāthiq bi llāh, was a far more illustrious writer of *ḥumaynī* poetry than he.[22] Thus, the claim that Ibn Falītah was the forefather of *ḥumaynī* poetry is unfounded. Dafari also argues that distinctive portions of the Yemeni strophic poem developed as the chorus that the congregation at Sufi ceremonies (*dhikrs*) recited.[23]

According to the historian al-Mizjājī, three Rasūlid sultans attended the audition (*samāʿ*) sessions of the Sufi master Ismāʿīl b. Abī Bakr al-Jabartī.[24] One Rasūlid poet, Ibn al-Muqrī, reported that the Sufis sang the poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Tilimsānī, and Ibn al-Raddād at their *samāʿ* sessions.[25] Both Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Tilimsānī had written strophic poetry. The same al-Jabartī introduced drums, flutes, and *ʿūd*s to the *samāʿ*, reported the historian al-Ahdal.[26] These musical performances of poetry were by no means limited to the ruling elites; Al-Jabartī also introduced the *samāʿ* into family occasions.[27] According to al-Mizjājī, the *shaykh* Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Zaylaʿī organized the *samāʿ* "in every village in Wādī Mawr and [Wādī] Surdud."[28]

If *ḥumaynī* poetry originated in the musical rituals of Yemeni Sufis, why was a courtier, Ibn Falītah, identified as its first practitioner? These origins may have been deliberately hidden. *Ḥumaynī* poetry's debt to Sufism became a contentious issue during or shortly after the career of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, a prominent *ḥumaynī* poet. As we will soon see, his influence in the transition of *ḥumaynī* poetry from Sufi circles in Lower Yemen to the courtly culture of the Zaydī highlands secured his prominence in the story of this poetry.

The controversy over Sufism in Yemen and the origins of *ḥumaynī* poetry begins in the sixteenth century. During this time, the Ottoman Empire established a military presence in Yemen, in the words of the historian al-Nahrawālī, "to fight the enemies of Islam."[29] Chief among

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[21] Ibid., 44–45.
[22] Ibid., 15–16.
[23] Ibid., 153.
[24] ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, *al-Ṣūfiyah wa l-fuqahāʾ fī l-yaman* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-Jīl al-Jadīd, 1976), 32.
[25] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 233.
[26] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Ṣūfiyah*, 32.
[27] Ibid., 32.
[28] Ibid., 32.
[29] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nahrawālī, *al-Barq al-yamānī fī l-fatḥ al-uthmānī*, ed. Ḥamd al-Jāsir, (Riyāḍ: Dār al-yamāmah, 1967), 70; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 32.

these enemies were the Portuguese, whose influence in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean was on the rise. In 1538, when Yemen became an official Ottoman province, the Empire strengthened its forces in that country.[30] The simultaneous expansion of the Ottomans and the Zaydī Sharaf al-Dīn Imāms into the Yemeni highlands brought an end to the rule of the Ṭāhirids (1454–1517), a dynasty that had been based in Lower Yemen. Although the Sharaf al-Dīn Imāms—principally the *de facto* Imām Muṭahhar b. Sharaf al-Dīn[31] (d. 1572)—mounted a fierce resistance to the Ottomans, in 1569, an expeditionary force led by the Ottoman official Sinān Pāsha forced al-Muṭahhar to surrender.[32] The Ottomans certainly made their presence known. They targeted the young male relatives of the house of Sharaf al-Dīn for coercion and co-option, exiling four of Muṭahhar's sons to Anatolia, and turning his other sons into Ottoman officials in Yemen.[33]

Another member of the house of Sharaf al-Dīn, the poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, became embroiled in a public dispute over the legitimacy of Sufism with another Zaydī noble, al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, who would go on to become the founder of the Qāsimī state (r. 1598–1620).[34] The dispute began when al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad composed and publicized a long poem entitled "*al-Kāmil al-mutadārik*," in which he rejects Sufis as heretics.[35] Among the practices that he denounces are dancing and the singing of love poetry. He writes:

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[30] Richard Blackburn, "The Era of Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā and his Son al-Muṭahhar (tenth/sixteenth Century)," in *Yemen Update* 42 (2000): 5.

[31] Muṭahhar's lame left leg and lack of training in Zaydī doctrine disqualified him from the Imāmate.

[32] Blackburn, "The Era of Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā," 5.

[33] Ibid., 8; Wilferd Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 139.

[34] While this opposition to Sufism predated Ottoman expansion (Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," 137n), Sufism seems to have represented a religiously objectionable aspect of the Ottomans for Zaydī scholars. (Ṣāliḥ b. Mahdī al-Maqbalī, *al-ʿAlam al-shāmikh fī ithār al-ḥaqq ʿalā l-ābāʾ wa l-mashāʾikh* (Beirut: Dār al-ḥadīth, 1985), 210; Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," 142–143; al-Ḥibshī, *al-Ṣūfiyyah*, 52.) Not only did al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad's reign mark a particularly low point for Sufism in highland Yemen; his anti-Sufi position also set the tone for later discussions due to the fact that he was the one who forced the Ottomans out of Yemen and consolidated the power of the Zaydī state over most of the country.

[35] Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, *Ḥatf anf al-āfik*, unpublished critical edition by Bernard Haykel and Wilferd Madelung, 3, line 22: "fools want to rush to one who slurps drink from the infidel heretic." "*fa-tawāthaba l-aghmāru yabghūna l-ladhī / laqafa l-saqiyya min al-kafūri l-mulḥidi*"; Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," 141.

> They speak of [God] to their [fellow] heretic as if the Lord loved with the pining love of beautiful girls […]
> Or as if He was the king, united with virgins with white necks and flushed cheeks, and with a beardless youth,
> Then He stood alone with none beside Him—Exalted be the deity above [consorting with] a nasal-voiced [singer] and a young [woman],
> They [Sufis] say "whosoever loves his Lord should visit virgins with soft breasts."

Al-Qāsim's polemical poem shows that the days had come to an end when Yemen's rulers and common people both participated in Sufi musical ceremonies.

In response to this poem attacking Sufism, the poet Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn (encouraged to one degree or another by the Ottoman official Sinān Pāshā), wrote a rejoinder, in which he defends singing and praises Sinān and Sultan Mehmet III.[36] Sinān's advocacy for Sufism and his relationship to Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn are discussed by the Yemeni writer al-Rashīdī in a genealogical work. He writes:

> Sinān used to feign piety and Sufi attitudes, fast for the three months [Shaʿbān, Ramaḍān, and Shawwāl] but despite this he busied himself with murder and bloodshed, killing anyone who angered him. When the Imām al-Qāsim (peace be upon him) wrote his famous ode on Sufism and it reached Sinān, he said: "Who will respond to the Imām al-Qāsim?" (peace be upon him) and it was said to him that the *sayyid* Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn would reply for he was eloquent. [Sinān] sought him out and presented him with his proposal and he agreed to his request so he responded to the Imām with an eloquent response. May his eloquence deteriorate (*taʿūdu nuksan*), God willing, because he cursed the Imām and praised Sinān in ways he did not deserve.[37]

Al-Rashīdī gainsays Sinān's commitment to Sufism and takes Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn to task for failing to show the Imām the respect he deserved. He also says that Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn volunteered to pen a retort to al-Qāsim's attack on Sufism and that "his heart was so full of love for the Turks that it caused him to stray from the right path."[38] Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, in turn, suggested that it was not Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's

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[36] Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," 139–140.

[37] ʿĀmir b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah al-Rashīdī, *Bughyat al-murīd wa-anīs al-farīd* (BL OIOC 3719), 20r. Al-Rashīdī's lack of sympathy for Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn may stem from the fact that his ancestor was killed by Sinān Pāshā. (Rieu, *Supplement*, 339).

[38] Al-Rashīdī, *Bughyat al-murīd*, 20r–v.

choice to advocate for Sufi poetic-musical practices. He refers to him as "defeated" (*maqhūr*).[39]

While it is possible that Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn was coerced into supporting Sufism, as his opponents the Imām al-Qāsim and al-Rashīdī suggest, Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's poem, taken at face value, seems to go far beyond political expediency. The main line of argument in Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's response to the Imām al-Qāsim's attack on Sufism was that the prophet Muḥammad encouraged singing love poems, admiring beardless youths, and dancing. Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn also defended these practices using Sufi technical terms, describing them as activities that involved incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*). He recommended that the Imām al-Qāsim study the works of the Sufis to rectify his wrong-headed prejudice against them.[40]

Some writers were not as forgiving towards Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn as the Imām al-Qāsim had been. The earliest of these writers is Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (d. 1699/1700), who writes, concerning Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn:

> He was overcome by the Sufis and an inclination towards their pernicious beliefs and this lowered him from the rank of his pious ancestors, making his honor a target for every slanderer. Among his faults was his retort to the Imām al-Manṣūr bi llāh al-Qāsim (peace be upon him) in [the form of] his famous ode whose opening line is "the truth is more luminous and clear to the rightly-guided…" where he crossed the line in insulting the Imām and was excessive in [speaking of] that which is not permissible among all of humanity: in support of tottering Sufism and straightening its distorted tenets. Perhaps he repented to erase the enormity of this sin. *Sayyid* Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Luṭf Allāh b. al-Muṭahhar b. al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn (may God have mercy on him) told me that the aforementioned *sayyid* was extremely regretful about this and claimed to have been coerced by the Pasha, Sinān, for he was [both] feared and incorrect in his views. The *sayyid* al-Muṭahhar b. Muḥammad al-Jarmūzī (may exalted God have mercy on him) related in his book, *The* Sīrah *of the Imām al-Manṣūr bi llāh Peace be Upon Him*, that the aforementioned *sayyid* Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah reached the Imām (peace be upon him) in the towns of Ḥabūr or al-Sūd repenting (83v) of his act.[41]

[39] Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, *Ḥatf anf al-āfik*, 2.

[40] Ibid., 10.

[41] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl* (BL OIOC 2426), 83r–v.

In a similar vein, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī (d. 1709/1710) remarks that Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn "was a partisan of the Ibn al-ʿArabī faction."[42] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī says that Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn "inclined towards Sufism too much."[43]

Another piece of evidence for Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's direct contact with Sufism consists of an anecdote preserved in his *fuṣḥā dīwān, al-Rawḍ al-marhūm wa l-durar al-manẓūm*. The *dīwān*'s editor, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh, writes:

> There was a man who made frequent trips between Ṣanʿāʾ and Mecca named Mullah ʿAlī b. al-Walī. He was from Algeria. He was knowledgeable in multiplication, division and addition. He was, in fact, an *imām* in this art. He wrote a number of useful works on it. In addition he had a gentle sophistication, a fine memory, perspicacity and knowledge of poetry. He occasionally composed some poetry. One time he headed off to see ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Muṭahhar. At that time my lord…Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah (God have mercy on him) was in Ḥajjah. When Mullah ʿAlī reached ʿAbd al-Raḥīm he honored him and elevated his position. [Mullah ʿAlī] benefited from him. He made contact with my lord Muḥammad, they became friends, and [Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah] had complete faith in him, because [Mullah ʿAlī] used to follow the Sufi path in his reverence. He wore wool and lived alone in his travels, relying on charity. Then he returned to Mecca (Almighty God protect it) in the year 1596/1597.[44]

Mullah ʿAlī also returned to Yemen in 1596/1597, at which point he began spending time with Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn.[45] When al-Qāsim made his claim to the leadership of Islam (the Imāmate), Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn fled Ṣanʿāʾ for Kawkabān. The two friends were reunited there for a time, and even when Mullah ʿAlī returned to Mecca, they continued to correspond. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh records a fragment of one of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's letters to Mullah ʿAlī. This fragment, replete with Ibn al-ʿArabī-inspired mystical vocabulary, reads:

> With the lover's parting from his beloved [the letter] brings with it every wonder. What is asked concerning that which brings two souls together

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[42] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar bi-dhikr man tashayyaʿa wa-shaʿar* (Beirut: Dār al-muʾarrikh al-ʿarabī, 1999), 3:117: "*wa-kāna yataʿaṣṣabu li-shaykh al-ṭāʾifa ibn al-ʿarabī*."

[43] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, ed. Ḥusayn al-ʿAmrī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), 712: "…*Kāna māʾilan ilā l-ṣūfiyya maylan zāʾidan*."

[44] Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Rawḍ al-marhūm wa l-durr al-manẓūm* (MS Western Mosque Library, *adab* 67), 41r.

[45] Ibid., 41v–42r.

> is that it bring together two bodies after their having been separated and that it lead to this subtle spirit from its allotted portion in the spiritual world the Beneficent and Merciful Paradisiac cooling breezes that descend from the Holy Presence (*al-ḥaḍrah al-qudsiyyah*) by means of proven divine expressions and Throne-like powers (*marasāt ʿarshiyyah kursiyyah*). Amen, O Lord of the Worlds.[46]

Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn was neither the first nor the last Zaydī gentleman to practice Sufism.[47] The *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl* describes the poet's uncle, ʿAlī b. al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn[48] (d. 1570/1571), by saying that he "had an inclination to learning and rite affiliation (*madhhab*) and a preoccupation with Sufism and those recognized for it. He commented upon something of Ibn ʿArabī's."[49] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā, al-Ḥasanī in his *Nasmat al-saḥar*, says that the poet's father, ʿAbdallah, wrote Sufi poems, "had Sufism in him" (*wa-kāna fihi al-taṣawwuf*), and that the poet's grandfather, the Imām Sharaf al-Dīn, grew angry with his son "over his inclination towards Sufism (*ʿalā maylihi ilā l-taṣawwuf*).[50]

Against the backdrop of the rise of al-Qāsim, a determined opponent of Sufism, Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's forays into mystical doctrine could not have been more poorly timed. The responsibility for "cleansing" Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn of the taint of Sufism likely rested with the editor of his *dīwān*, his kinsman ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh b. al-Muṭahhar b. Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 1638/1639). The son of one of the Sharaf al-Dīns who was exiled to Istanbul, ʿĪsā worked in the Ottoman-supervised Sharaf al-Dīn court as an aide to the vizier Muḥammad Pāshā. There, he composed two histories: *Al-Anfās (or al-Nafḥah) al-yamaniyyah fī l-dawlah al-muḥammadiyyah*, and *Rāwḥ al-rūḥ fī-mā jarā baʿd al-miʾah al-tāsiʿah min al-futūḥ*. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh "was not free of partisanship towards [the Turks] in his two books because they took care of him," said Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī.[51] Less charitably, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaymī al-Kawkabānī (d. 1738/1739) said that "he used to sympathize with the Turks, craftily laying snares for the bird [of wealth] by associating

[46] Ibid., 42r.
[47] Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Kaynaʿī (d. 1390/1391) founded Sufi communities all over northern Yemen and enjoyed the good graces of the reigning Imām. Madelung, "Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism," 134.
[48] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 462.
[49] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 206v.
[50] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:294–295.
[51] Ibid., 2:464.

with them."[52] In one of his poems, ʿĪsā borrows the following pair of lines in praise of Turks from Ibrāhīm b. Yaḥyā al-Ghazzī (d. 1129/1130): "Among brave young Turks who did not, in any circumstances, leave a single sound or shred of their reputation to the thunder [of battle], A people who, when greeted, were benevolent angels, but when fought were demons."[53]

After the Ottomans left Yemen, ʿĪsā swiftly adapted to the new order by taking employment in the mountain fastness of Shahārah with the Imām al-Muʾayyad bi llāh, the son of al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad. According to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh composed and sent to the Imām al-Manṣūr al-Qāsim an ode (*qaṣīdah*) to be cleared of the charge that he preferred the Turks to the Qāsimīs.[54] Nevertheless, accusations that his sympathies lay with the Turks persisted. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī reported that after his transfer to the Qāsimī court, "whenever those statements he made in his works denigrating Zaydī rule were mentioned in his presence he became very ashamed."[55]

It is not clear whether Sufism factored into the insinuations some made about ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh. At the very least, Ottomans promoted Sufism and the Zaydī Imams opposed it. There is a striking contrast between ʿĪsā's generous appraisal of the Sufi Mullah ʿAlī and his quotation of Mullah ʿAlīʾs mystical correspondence with the poet in Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *dīwān* and his calumny against Sufism in the following poem:

> I offered these lines to God when I saw Ibn al-ʿArabī's depredations against [God's] pure ones […] God curse Ibn al-ʿArabī […] he is a bastard who hated the People of the Cloak, the family of the Prophet.[56]

One may tentatively conclude that ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh wrote the poem late in his career while working in the Qāsimī court due to the fact

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[52] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaymī al-Kawkabānī, *Ṭīb al-samar fī awqāt al-saḥar* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1990), 120: "*wa-kāna yaʿtazī ilā l-atrāk wa-yanṣubu min al-ittiṣāl bihim li-ṭayr al-ashrāk*." This sentence seems to be faulty.

[53] Ibid., 121: "*fī fityatin min kumāti l-turki mā tarakat / li l-raʿdi fī ḥālatin ṣawtan wa-lā ṣītā / qawmun idhā qūbilū kānū malāʾikatan / ḥusnan wa-in qūtilū kānū ʿafarītā*"; Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:466.

[54] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 518: "*wa-lahu qaṣīdah katabahā ilā l-imām al-qāsim bin muḥammad yatanaṣṣalu fīhā ʿammā yunsabu ilayhi min tafḍīlih li l-dawlah al-turkiyyah ʿalāʾ l-dawlah al-qāsimiyyah*."

[55] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:466: "*wa-kāna idhā udhkirat ʿindahu lafaẓāt aṭlaqahā fī muʾallafātih mimmā yaqdaḥu fī l-dawla al-imāmiyya yastaḥī kathīran*."

[56] Quoted in Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 3:50–51.

that the Ottomans held Ibn al-ʿArabī in great reverence and forbade slandering him.[57] He may have also revised Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *ḥumaynī dīwān* while in Shahārah.[58]

In Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *ḥumaynī dīwān*, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh provides another version of the story of the poet's first encounter with Mullah ʿAlī. Here, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh identifies the Algerian Sufi only as "a poet from among the poets of the Maghreb who excel at the composition of uninflected North African poetry" (*al-naẓm al-malḥūn al-maghribī*) who composed a humorous imitation (*muʿāraḍah*) of one of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's poems.[59] This portrayal of Mullah ʿAlī as a witty dialect poet differs substantially from his portrayal in Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *fuṣḥā dīwān* as a cerebral ascetic. This difference might be explained contextually; after all, the *ḥumaynī* dīwān deals with dialect poetry. However, the fact that his employer opposed Sufism would have been a good reason not to mention Mullah ʿAlī's mystical tendencies.

ʿĪsāʾ b. Luṭf Allāh prefaces Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *ḥumaynī dīwān* with a fascinating disclaimer:

> Know that my lord Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah (may Almighty God have mercy on him) did not compose these famous love poems (*qaṣāʾid*) in the fashion of the masters of description [in poetry], using allusions (*kināyāt*) to the beloved that consist of divine descriptions and prophetic characteristics along the lines of what we find in the poems of [Sufi poet] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAlawī and those who followed his path. All of the meanings (*maʿānī*) of most of their strophic poems (*muwashshaḥāt*) and love poems (*ghazaliyyāt*) are allusions and do not deal with a specific beloved. Instead they are allegories (*ishārāt*) to the understanding of love prevalent among the Sufis (*ahl al-ṭarīqah*). This is clear. No doubts or improbable suppositions are to be entertained concerning [Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn] (may God have mercy on him) for he never composed a stitch of amatory poetry (*ghazal*) unless it was about a specific beloved. If he described union and separation it happened as he described it. If he sighed due to separation or departure then that is what had happened. If he wrote of turning away [by a beloved] and complained of being shunned and aloofness then that was how it was. One of my companions told me that a group of people argued over an ode by my lord Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah, a strophic poem (*muwashshaḥ*) that mentioned Laylā. Some of

[57] Knysh, *Ibn Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 334n117, 381n183.

[58] Although it was printed in Egypt and later reprinted in Yemen, there is no critical edition of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn's *dīwān*. Examining the manuscripts may provide clues as to the editorial process described here.

[59] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 131. ʿĪsā also mentions that "a (or some) North African notable(s)" (*baʿḍ aʿyān al-maghrib*) was present at the *majlis* of the vizier Ḥasan Pasha in al-Rawḍah. Ibid., 187.

> them said that Laylā referred to the Kaʿba. One of them said: "let us go and ask him about this because he knows best." When they were standing in his presence they told him the story and he said: "You have all gone astray in your imaginings. All I meant by ʿLaylāʾ was an allusion to a lovely girl of stunning, exuberant beauty and delicate pulchritude."[60]

True to the promise of his disclaimer, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh peppered both of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *dīwān*s with accounts of his successful and unsuccessful love affairs. The Yemeni scholar J. Dafari first articulated the idea that the editor of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *dīwān* deliberately obscured the poet's link to Sufism. He observes:

> From the foregoing [disclaimer], one can sense a feeling of earnestness on the part of ʿIsā to deny any connection of [Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn] with the Sufi doctrines of his time…But one may question the authenticity of some of the versions of ʿIsā b. Luṭf Allāh. Most of the stories which he narrates might have been the creation of his own in order to give an earthly colouring to some of the poems. Moreover, it is possible that he did not insert those poems in which Sufi principles are clearly manifested, and which perhaps presented him with the problem of inventing appropriate stories that would have given them a worldly background.[61]

Dafari's suspicions are well-founded. Of course, it is impossible to establish whether or not the incidents reported in the *dīwān* actually occurred, as they tend to deal with love affairs and the like. One exception is an oft-repeated anecdote concerning a tricky legal bind Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn fell into with one of his slave girls.

ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh's introduction to Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *fuṣḥā dīwān* makes it clear that he began assembling both *dīwān*s at the request of Sinān Pasha. The attempt in the *ḥumaynī dīwān* to distance Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn from Sufism can be explained in one of two ways: eliminating Sufism represented either the editor's preexisting animus, suppressed during his service to the Ottomans; or Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *ḥumaynī dīwān* reached its final form after the end of Ottoman rule in Yemen and the editor's transfer to the Qasimi Imām's court in Shahārah.

Twice in Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's *ḥumaynī dīwān*, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh offers a short history of *ḥumaynī* poetry and Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's place in it. In his introduction, he notes that Aḥmad b. Falītah was the first writer of *ḥumaynī* poetry, and ʿAbdallah b. Abī Bakr al-Mazzāḥ, another Rasūlid poet, was the second. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh writes:

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[60] Ibid., 17.
[61] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 66–67.

> Then came the jurist and *imām*, the *imām* of knowledge and of the [Sufi] path, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī. He was one of those who passed the [wine] cup. His themes surpass a garden watered by ever-present clouds. He lived during the reign of Sultan ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and he lived into the reign of my father the Imām Sharaf al-Dīn. On him and on his son the Caliph al-Muṭahhar [al-ʿAlawī] he wrote panegyrics whose place the stars would love to occupy and whose paths the moons covet.[62]

In his disclaimer against allegorical readings, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh makes ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAlawī the paradigmatic writer of Sufi love poetry and uses him as a foil for Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn. In contrast, the passage quoted above stresses al-ʿAlawī's talent as a poet and his identity as a courtier who served rulers, composed panegyric, and drank wine. In this passage, al-ʿAlawī serves as a chronological bridge between the two Rasūlid poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn. Though the editor does not obfuscate al-ʿAlawī's Sufism here, he emphasizes this writer's role as a courtly poet.

Numerous Yemeni historical sources and secondary works in English accept this rendition of the early history of *ḥumaynī* poetry (*i.e.*, Ibn Falītah to ʿAbdallah al-Mazzāḥ to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAlawī to Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn).[63] Dafari's important revisions to this chronology have been unjustly ignored. Among *ḥumaynī* poets, none of Ibn Falītah's predecessors or contemporaries earn a place in ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh's oft-cited version of *ḥumaynī* history. Neither do immediate predecessors of the sixteenth-century Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn. According to al-Dafari, al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥamzī (1488–1517) and his son Yaḥyā, also ancestors of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, composed *ḥumaynī* poetry.[64] ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf

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[62] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 13–14.

[63] ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlī al-Wazīr, *Taʾrīkh ṭabaq al-ḥalwā wa-ṣuḥāf al-mann wa l-salwā*, edited by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Jāzim as *Taʾrīkh al-yaman khilāl al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar al-hijrī—al-sābiʿ ʿashar al-mīlādī 1045–1090 H., 1635–1680 M.* (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1985), 65; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, *Ghāyat al-amānī fī akhbār al-quṭr al-yamānī*, ed. Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿĀshūr and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyārah (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ʿarabī, 1968), 2:571–572; Muḥammad Amīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar* (Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāt, 1966), 3:236; Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah al-ʿAmrī, *Safīnat al-adab wa l-taʾrīkh*, ed. Ḥusayn b. ʿAbdallah al-ʿAmrī, (Damascus: Dār al-fikr, 2001), 3:1231; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah fī l-yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1986), 110; David Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* Poetry," 223–224; P, 108; Lucine Taminian, "Playing With Words: The Ethnography of Poetic Genres in Yemen" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2001), 129.

[64] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 59.

al-Dīn, the father of the poet Muḥammad, also composed Sufi poetry.[65] Fourteen *ḥumaynī* poems can be found in the *dīwān* of the Zaydī poet Mūsā b. Yaḥyā Bahrān (d. 1526/1527). Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan quoted a *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥ* written by Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn's paternal uncle ʿAlī.[66] The poet's maternal uncle, ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad al-Qashanshalī, also composed *ḥumaynī* poetry.[67] Dafari summarized his views of the prehistory of *ḥumaynī* poetry by saying, "I do not have the slightest doubt that the production of *humaini [sic]*, between the eighth and the tenth century [AH], was enormous."[68]

Taking into account Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's many predecessors, one can explain the central position he assumes in the history of *ḥumaynī* poetry in historical and literary terms. He was not, after all, the first Zaydī *ḥumaynī* poet. In his account of *ḥumaynī* poetry's origins and development, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh omits those who preceded Ibn Falītah, prolific Sufi composers such as Abū Bakr al-ʿAydarūs and al-Hādī al-Sūdī, as well as Zaydī predecessors and contemporaries of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn.

According to Dafari, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh's identification of Ibn Falītah as the first to write *ḥumaynī* poetry could indicate either that the poet introduced the compound *muwashshaḥ* (see p. 311) in its finalized form, or that "he was the man who gave *ḥumaini*, as a whole, the right of citizenship in the literary circles of South Arabia."[69] ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh's rendition of *ḥumaynī* history tries to demonstrate that the *ḥumaynī* poetry of a sixteenth-century Zaydī nobleman hearkened back to the Rasūlid and Ṭāhirid courts of the past rather than to Sufi *dhikr*s.[70] Due to the quality, volume, and popularity of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn's poetry, ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh portrays him as the first Zaydī court poet just as the Zaydī Qāsimī dynasty was emerging. He was a major poet who lived at the right place and at the right time.[71]

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[65] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:294. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā relates that ʿAbdallah's Sufism and *qāt*-chewing caused friction with his father, the Imām Sharaf al-Dīn.

[66] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 206v–207r.

[67] His work will be discussed in Chapter Two.

[68] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 45–46.

[69] Ibid., 90n43.

[70] Īsāʾ b. Luṭf Allāh at one point discussed the opulence and architectural audacity of the Ṭāhirids. Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 212.

[71] Dafari locates a different but equally baffling account of *ḥumaynī* history in a manuscript copy of Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallah al-Sharʿabī's *Ṭirāz al-majālis wa-samīr kull nāhid wa-ānis*. This account places similar emphasis on the figure of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn

Largely through the Imām's crackdown on Sufis, the work of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, and ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh's portrayal of Ibn Shāraf al-Dīn's work, *ḥumaynī* poetry migrated from Sufi *samāʿ* sessions to the parlors and wedding banquets of Zaydī nobles.

As a number of nineteenth-century sources prove, the Qāsimī Imāms' opposition may have hampered interest in Sufism among Zaydī noblemen for a time, but it did not put an end to it. In an exchange between the influential jurist Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī and a student and colleague of his, al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallah (d. 1803 or 1807/1808), al-Shawkānī describes al-Qāsim's umbrage at the teachings of an unidentified group of Sufis. When al-Shawkānī took issue with one of his judgements against this group, al-Qāsim wrote a long poem against Sufism redolent of the Imām al-Qāsim's treatise:

> Some of them dance to the [music of the lute's] strings
> quaffing wine from [their] cups,
> They enter an ecstatic state over every dark and doe-eyed
> [beauty], making amends for their love [by drinking]
> his saliva,
> For the sake of ecstasy they have made the [lute's] second
> string their companion [and] at their *dhikr* the *laḥn* is [the only] inflection.[72]

Al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad apparently convinced al-Shawkānī, for in his response to al-Qāsim's poem, al-Shawkānī differentiates between two groups of Sufis: responsible Sufis and "…those who arise early to the [lute's] strings / quaffing wine from [their] cups…." He identifies the latter—among them Sufis that attained prominence in Rasūlid Yemen—as infidels (*kuffār*).[73] Later in life, al-Shawkānī qualified this condemnation, arguing that since these people lived in different times and places, it was difficult for him to pass judgment on them.[74] The nineteenth-century *ḥumaynī* poet Muḥsin b. ʿAbd al-Karīm, who was said to have been a Sufi, may have been one of the people whom al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad and al-Shawkānī had in mind in their attacks.[75]

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and identifies courtly Lower Yemen as the wellspring of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 119–120.

[72] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 553.

[73] Ibid., 555–556.

[74] Ibid., 556–557.

[75] ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī fī ʿaṣr khurūj al-atrāk al-awwal min al-yaman, 1045–1289 A.H., 1635–1879* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Yamaniyyah, Tawzʿī Dār al-Manāhil, 1986), 648–650.

In sum, the Arabic accounts of the origins and development of *ḥumaynī* poetry are unreliable historical sources. Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry probably originated in *samāʿ* sessions organized by Sufi followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the Rasūlid period. For the next century and a half, this style of poetry was employed by Sufis and court poets, both Shāfiʿī and Zaydī. Due to the Qāsimī Imām's antipathy towards Sufism, it became necessary to separate *ḥumaynī* poetry from its Sufi roots. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh b. Sharaf al-Dīn elevated Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn, a prolific *ḥumaynī* poet, to a central place in the poetic tradition. In doing so, he sought to cleanse both Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn and himself of associations with Sufism and the Turkish authorities. By casting the poet as the prototypical courtier, he assured the survival of *ḥumaynī* poetry in new social and cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, the association between *ḥumaynī* poetry and mysticism was never completely severed. Sufism survived among Zaydīs, some of whom wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry, despite the intermittent opposition of religious authorities. The possibility that sensual imagery was imbued with metaphysical significance ensured that a determined listener or reader could still experience *ḥumaynī* poetry mystically.

Parts of the Poem

bayt

1 Lover, you don't know what is in my heart, it knows what it knows,
2 My heart is melting from the heat of the flame—who will help me put it out?
3 O noble men, O neighbors, I cannot conceal my love,
4 You do not visit your lovesick and broken-hearted companion and you say "God heal him."

tawshīḥ

5 Visit me—what is in a visit? It is a benefit, not a loss. I am looking forward to it.

taqfīl

6 My lovers reminded me that the watcher can never see that which is hidden,
7 I said: send raisin [or date] wine to the one who is sober—fill him with it until he cannot sober up.

bayt

8 When we reveled in drink and glanced at our wine-pourer he did not frown,

9 Although he enjoyed our encounters, he deceived and confused me,
10 When asked about me he swore he had not seen me, but he was there all the while, hiding,
11 Matters between us are strange—in them everything is wonderful.

tawshīḥ

12 We joined then parted, we learned every meaning, with flute and song.

taqfīl

13 We met on the dune, and loved there,
14 My little wine-pourer was present and he was wise, setting the mind at ease and curing it.

ʿAbdallah b. Abī Bakr al-Mazzāḥ (d. 1436/1437), a poet of the Rasūlid period who wrote this *muwashshaḥ*, uses words sparingly to achieve a pointillistic effect, especially in lines five and twelve (the "*tawshīḥ*").[76] Whereas a classical Arabic ode would display parallelistic effects that emerge in tension with the caesura between hemistiches, the syntax of each section of this *muwashshaḥ* is slightly different. The first section, the *bayt*, has top-heavy lines with breaks that match those of the printed page. The second section, the *tawshīḥ*, has three formal and syntactic parts. The poem uses antithesis frequently, such as melting-extinguishing, affliction-healing, benefit-loss, watching-blindness, drinking-sobriety, and enjoyment-frowning.

The poem uses a pastiche of Arabic lyric themes. The pun at the end of verse twelve (*maʿnā-maghnā*) suggests that this poem, like the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ*, was set to music.[77] With its bacchic and homoerotic themes, which suggest it may have been sung at symposia, the poem flouts religious norms. However, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the atmosphere of ecstasy the poem conjures has a secular or a mystical purpose. Perhaps this ambiguity is deliberate. Lines five and seven of this poem are largely incomprehensible to the poem's Yemeni anthologizer, Muḥammad ʿAbdūh Ghānim, and to me.

While this poem belongs to the classical Arabic poetic tradition, it differs from its Andalusian and Eastern predecessors in several ways.

[76] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 221.

[77] This paronomasia succinctly expresses an aesthetic ideal of *ḥumaynī* poetry. As Jean Lambert stated: "The aesthetic ideal of *ghināʾ ṣanʿānī* is founded on a major principle which operates on two levels: the text and the melody must unite so as to form a unity, *maʿnā wa-magnā* (more literally, 'meaning and chant')." Jean Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme: Le chant de Sanaa dans la société yéménite* (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1997), 126.

In the first place, three distinct parts compose each of this poem's two strophes: "verse" (*bayt*), "ornamentation" (*tawshīḥ*), and "lock" (*taqfīl*). This "compound *muwashshaḥ*" structure is particular to Yemen.[78] Furthermore, the Arabic is uninflected and the poem uses at least one Yemeni dialect, albeit sparingly: al-Mazzāḥ uses "*ḥād*/*yiḥīd*" (seeing) in verses six, eight, and ten;[79] "*dhahan*/*yidhhin*" (to awaken) in verse seven;[80] and an alternate version of line 11 incorporates the "*alif-mim*" definite article, a vestige of Sabaic that survived in some Yemeni dialects.[81] "*Yilabbis-mulabbas*," the poem's first pun and a *double entendre*, relies upon Arabic diglossia, as does so much of *ḥumaynī* poetry.[82]

Music

Ḥumaynī poetry, which was often set to music, tends to use a great deal of words associated with musical instruments, performance, and appreciation. One of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī's (d. 1834/1835) *bayt*s is particularly rich in this regard:

> The tree was agitated and leaned towards the bird when the dawn breeze blew,
> The sleeping nightingales awoke and repeated the pleasant melody,
> A gang of nightingales that brought forth the tune of that which is sickly and stretched tight,
> They caused a resurrection for love, and gave life to the market for joy and ecstasy.[83]

The description of birds gathering in the last line of this *bayt* as a "*qiyāmah*" (resurrection) emphasizes the interweaving of earthly and

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[78] I use David Semaḥ's term "compound *muwashshaḥ*" in preference to J. al-Dafari's "regular *muwashshaḥ*." See p. 311.

[79] This verb is particular to the Tihāmah—the Red Sea coast of Yemen. Al-Mazzāḥ, writing in the Rasūlid heartlands of Lower Yemen and the Tihāmah, presumably would have been well-versed in this dialect.

[80] P, 169.

[81] Werner Diem, *Skizzen jemenitischer Dialekte* (Beirut/Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), 66.

[82] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 84.

[83] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, *Tarjīʿ al-aṭyār bi-muraqqaṣ al-ashʿār*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā al-Iryānī and ʿAbdallah ʿAbd al-Ilāh al-Aghbarī (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1986), 136; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 301.

spiritual.[84] Such romantic interplay between nature and human sentiment, a common trope in *ḥumaynī* poetry, is rooted in early Arabic love poetry. A series of clever *double entendres* link this *bayt* directly to musical performance: the "tree" (*ʿūd*) of the first verse also means "lute"; the "pleasant melody" (*naghmat al-rakhīm*) of verse two also means "the melody of the second string"; and the "gang" (*zumrah*) of nightingales in verse three evokes the flute (*zamr*).[85] One verse can be translated literally as the "tune of that which is sickly and stretched tight" (*naghmat al-ḥāziq al-saqīm*). The same verse can also mean "the melody of the first string."[86] This image evokes the stress of the smitten lover. The concert of the final line culminates with "ecstasy" (*ṭarab*), which might refer to the *ṭurbī*, a Yemeni stringed instrument made out of leather or apricot wood.

The composition and preservation of *ḥumaynī* poetry is bound to the fate of Ṣanʿānī singing (*al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*), the premier form of Yemeni art music. As Jean Lambert discusses in *La médecine de l'âme*, Yemen enjoys a wide variety of music, ranging from the songs of camel drivers to Zaydī muezzins' prayers (*taṣbīḥ*) following the *ādhān*. Ṣanʿānī singers, who often use *ḥumaynī* poetry, performed, together with percussionists and lute-players at elite *qāt*-chews and weddings.[87] Many poetic and musical activities in Yemen revolve around wedding festivities, including call and response religious chanting.[88]

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[84] The reference to Resurrection Day centers on its character as a gathering, as in the synonymous "*yawm al-ḥashr*." In the two recordings that I have heard of the full poem, "*Yā Shārī l-barq*," this *bayt* has either been abridged to the first two lines, or omitted altogether. It is not clear whether this was due to time constraints or if the religious allusion was considered too risqué.

[85] The second string of the Ṣanʿānī lute is called the "*rakhīm*." ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, *Tarjīʿ al-aṭyār*, 136n2; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 396; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Muftī, *Ṣanʿāʾ ḥawat kull fann*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbduh Ghānim (Beirut: Dār al-manāhil, 1987), 25.

[86] The first string of the Ṣanʿānī lute is called the "*ḥāziq*" (literally: "stretched tight") or "*saqīm*" ("ill"—It looks sickly because it is so thin). ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, *Tarjīʿ al-aṭyār*, 135n3; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 396.

[87] The familiar five- or six-stringed and wood-bodied *ʿūd* appeared in Aden in the last century. Before its introduction, the smaller four-stringed *ṭarab* (also called *ṭurbī* or *ʿūd*) was used. Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 86–92; Philip D. Schuyler, "Music and Tradition in Yemen," in *Asian Music* 22.1 (1990–1991): 59; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 34.

[88] Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 60–70.

The performance of the *qawmah*, whose textual counterpart is the Yemenī compound *muwashshaḥ*, concludes these ritual performances. According to Lambert, the *qawmah* can be defined as a "suite" or "a succession of movements in which the mode, the rhythm and the tempo are fixed."[89] Each of the three melodically and rhythmically distinct sections of the *qawmah* suite corresponds to one of the three sections of the compound *muwashshaḥ*.[90] According to Lambert, the *tawshīḥ* section of the *muwashshaḥ* tends to be performed in a theatrical manner.[91] This final performance of such music would revolve around material of a much less religious nature that might even border on the erotic. The tension between pious content and erotic themes will be addressed in Chapter Three.

[89] Ibid., 109, *cf*. Philip D. Schuyler, "Hearts and Minds: Three Attitudes toward Performance Practice and Music Theory in the Yemen Arab Republic," in *Ethnomusicology* 34.1 (1990): 10–11. A remark by the redactor of the *dīwān* of Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ (d. 1774) may indicate that *mubayyatāt* were also arranged as suites. He introduced a *mubayyat* by saying "he said, praising [Imām al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās] after he had heard the *nawbah* being played in this meter…" (*wa-qāla yamdaḥuhu wa-qad samiʿa l-nawbata tuḍrabu fī wazn mithl hādhī*…). Al-Fāyiʿ, *Azāhir al-muḥayyāʾ*, 11v.

[90] Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 114.

[91] Ibid., 78.

CHAPTER TWO

DIALECT IN *ḤUMAYNĪ* POETRY

Ḥumaynī *and Humor*

According to the editor of his *dīwān*, the poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn became smitten with a beautiful young girl at a creek in al-Sharaf.[1] After making inquiries, the lovesick man found out that she was betrothed to a relative of hers, a shepherd. Although Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn offered the girl's father a generous sum to break off the engagement, political unrest forced the family to flee, and the deal was left temporarily unsealed. In response, Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn wrote the following poem about this haughty girl:

> At the watering hole I met the local beauty—she met me at the well,
> I said "why did you take away the dipper? I am a little thirsty—water me!"
> She threw the scoop to me and shot me a glance whose [steely] determination watered me with death.
> She said "hurry up—don't take your time—my companions have drunk and they are all gone."
> I said: "since your friends have left I will accompany you on the way and walk with you on the road."

According to the narrative that accompanies the poem, by the time the girl was presented (*zuffat*) to Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, "she took off her veil, displaying an ugly face that brought together all forms of hideousness."[2] In response to this poem, Fakhr al-Dīn ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad al-Qashanshalī, the poet's maternal uncle, composed a *muʿāraḍah* that made light of his nephew's predicament and contained "wondrous license and enchanting humor which would cheer up one

[1] There are several places called al-Sharaf in Yemen. Due to the fact that this poem refers to a place called "al-Muharraq," this particular al-Sharaf must be the one northwest of Ṣanʿā'. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yaman wa-qabāʾilihā* (Ṣanʿā': Dār al-ḥikmah al-yamaniyyah, 1996), 2:690.

[2] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 125–130.

who was depressed…" ("*al-muḥtawī ʿalāʾ l-majānah al-muʿjibah wa l-fakāhah al-muṭribah mā law samiʿahu kaʾībun istarāḥ*…").[3]

> At the watering hole I met a beast, a demon wearing a ragged wool pullover,
> Black, bearing a big bucket, panting, a death-rattle echoing in her throat,
> A monkey without a tail, her cheeks like old shoes.
> she has fine black thighs sometimes they are hidden, sometimes in view,
> suitable for [being covered with] crap.

Al-Qashanshalī tried to hide the poem, fearing it would anger Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, but he was too late: it had already become popular. In response to this poem, Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn effected a rapprochement. He wrote, "I met a blossom and I met a demon / they came together in the same person."[4]

Al-Qashanshalī's *muʿāraḍah* achieves its humor not only through its lowly themes, but also through its use of dialect. By definition, *ḥumaynī* poetry uses Yemeni dialects.[5] However, when reading *ḥumaynī ghazal* such as this poem by Sharaf al-Dīn, one is struck by how few dialectical elements appear. If not for their lack of inflection, most of Sharaf al-Dīn's poems would work almost exclusively with if limited, a rich, palette of images drawn from ʿAbbasid *ghazal*.[6] This observation also applies to *ḥumaynī* love poetry that Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's successors in Highland Yemen wrote.

Dafari concedes that *ḥumaynī* poetry needs a few colloquialisms, but he finds an abundance of them unpleasant.[7] Higher than average concentrations of dialect, Dafari argues, could be found in poems that feature dialogue and in the rural *qaṣīdah* (see p. 312).[8] The reason

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[3] Ibid., 130.
[4] Ibid., 131.
[5] J.A. Dafari catalogues the various dialectical elements that can be found in *ḥumaynī ghazal*, the most common type of *ḥumaynī* poetry. These consist of the following: the use of *yā al-taṣghīr* to inject a note of tenderness; the use of the colloquial definite article ("*am*"); the interjective ("*wā*") as an expression of sorrow; particles denoting the imperfect ("*shā*" or "*ʿā*"); colloquial expressions (e.g., *ʿalaysh, yāsīn ʿalayk*); the pronominal suffix "*sh*"; the ungrammatical agreement of plural subject and verbal predicate; dropping the *nūn* from indicative verbs; the use of the vernacular relative particle "*dhī*" regardless of gender and number; "*qad*" before a noun; lack of declension of "*abū*" and "*akhū*"; colloquial words without classical equivalents (e.g., *bāk/yibūk, wakan/yūkan*); colloquial roots that mean something different from their classical Arabic counterparts (e.g., *ḥād, samsam, ḥanab*); and Arabic words that assume a nonstandard form (e.g., *antashad*). Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 265–271.
[6] Ibid., 257, 270.
[7] Ibid., 264.
[8] Ibid., 257, 295n22.

dialect was used at all had to do with a concept called "*laḥn*," which Dafari defines as the omission of case endings and the "occasional use of words, or particles, or homely expressions, that savour colloquialism."[9] Although Dafari is steeped in the tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry, it is not clear that his definition of "*laḥn*" would be comprehensible to premodern Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poets. While writers frequently use the words "*laḥn*" and "*malḥūn*" to describe *ḥumaynī* poetry, only a few discussions address the exact meaning of these terms. Ibn Barī and others explain the word "*laḥn*," which has a wide semantic range, in the following way: "*Laḥn* has six meanings: an error in inflection; dialect word; singing; intuition; allusion; and meaning."[10] To describe a *ḥumaynī* poem as "*malḥūn*" might mean that it is grammatically incorrect, it contains a hidden message, or it is set to music. Any combination of these meanings is also appropriate. Therefore, *laḥn* is too diffuse a concept to account adequately for *ḥumaynī* poetry's use of dialect, and Dafari's definition of *laḥn*, while focused, is too arbitrary and ahistorical to be helpful. Indeed, Dafari underestimates the importance of dialect to the aesthetics of *ḥumaynī* poetry.

The single most important incentive to dialect is humor. As a rule, dialect assumes much greater prominence in humorous poetry. Al-Qashanshalī's poem, for example, is ripe with the following colloquialisms: "a demon" ("*siʿlā*"),[11] "ragged" (*daʿbaqī*), "big bucket" (*gharab*), "panting" (*tajirr nahlih*), "death-rattle" (*shirḥijah*), "throat" (*mukhannaq*), "old shoes" (*aḥdhā mashriqī*), and "thighs" (*ṣabḥ*). It also disparages the girl for her dark skin.

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[9] Ibid., 9, 21.

[10] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 13:381: "*Qāla ibnu barīyyi wa-ghayruhu: li l-laḥn sitatu maʿānin: al-khaṭaʾu fī l-iʿrābi wa l-lughatu wa l-ghināʾu wa l-fiṭnatu wa l-taʿrīḍu wa l-maʿnā.*" Al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr, among other exegetes, gloss the word as "meaning" where it appears in Qurʾān 47:30: "*wa-law nashāʾu la-araynākahum fa-la-ʿaraftahum bi-siyamāhum wa-la-taʿrifannahum fī laḥni l-qawli wa llāhu yaʿlamu aʿmālakum.*"

[11] According to B, 559, the "*siʿlā*" is "a demon that climbs up a man's chest and pisses in his ears," and "a succubus." This is also a classical Arabic word.

Code-Switching

Instead of relying extensively on dialect, poets like Sharaf al-Dīn make use of small amounts of dialect for literary effect. A relatively common effect in *ḥumaynī* love poetry involves the description of the beloved using recognizably Tihāman words like the verb *ḥāda/yaḥīdu* ("to gaze"). Such effects, I will argue, refer humorously to the social origins of the beloved, who often seems to have served or sung for the poet and his circle at their symposia.

The Tihāmah, on Yemen's western coast, interacted a great deal more with East Africa than any other part of Yemen. The descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sādah*), jurists (*quḍāh*), and their descendants in attendance believed that its inhabitants, particularly the so-called *ʿAbīd* of African ancestry, were of a low social status. By poking fun at Tihāman speech patterns, such poems make jokes at the beloved's expense and reinforce social stratification.

Ḥumaynī poetry shares this literary effect with the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ*. Poets in al-Andalus may have rounded off their *muwashshaḥāt* with a line containing the local Arabic vernacular or snippets of Romance, often with an off-color intent. If, as Pierre Cachia surmises, this *kharjah* was left for a dancing girl from among the Christian populace to sing, the vaudevillian comedy could not have been missed by even the most inebriated listener.[12] The vernacular elements of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry are very rarely concentrated in a single line as they are in the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ*. Instead, they are generally scattered and scarce. Yet they share the technique of linguistic "code-switching"—a poem's humorous descent from the high register of scholars to the language of the street—that distinguished Andalusian strophic poetry.[13]

Dafari translates the following relevant passage from his copy of Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallah al-Sharʿabī's *Ṭirāz al-majālis wa-samīr kull nāhid wa-ānis*:

> The population of Tihāmah is a mixture of races whose tongue is Arabic, but whose features (*ṣuwar*) are predominantly Negroid – with sunburnt faces and curly hair (*shaʿr mufalfal*). How far is this from the traditional

[12] Pierre Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads of Egypt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 11–12.

[13] David Hanlon, "A Sociolinguistic view of *hazl* in the Andalusian Arabic *muwashshaḥ*," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60.1 (1997): 35–46; Otto Zwartjes, *Love Songs from al-Andalus* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1997), 277–287.

> saying: 'O Muʿādh, when you reach the *wādī* of al-Ḥuṣaib let your beast trot' [lest you become bewitched by the alluring beauty of its women]. (*Yā muʿādh, idhā dakhalta wādī al-ḥuṣayb fa-harwil*) You ought to know-may thy life be preserved—that the [?*humaini*?] poets of Yaman mention the beauty of the women of Zabīd by way of imitation of their predecessors, and in doing so, they act the role of the fool, the blind, and the ignorant.[14]

For ruling class poets like Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn who lived in the highlands, a reference to the dark complexion and foreign accent of their wine stewards, entertainers, and servants probably added a note of levity, especially when it interrupted an otherwise serious meditation on unrequited love.

Most *ḥumaynī* poets seem to have been unconcerned or unaware of the Tihāmah's distinctive musical and poetic traditions, which were influenced by East African traditions.[15] However, Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf (d. 1705/1706) writes the following lines about a singing girl named Suwaydā ("Blacky"):[16]

> Play the *ʿūd*, miss, with both right and left hands.
> Bring that fingertip down and bring the other up like this.
> Sing the "*dān dān*" and then whatever comes to your mind.
> May God preserve you and may your beauty increase.
> I saw you when you stood up, dancing, the best among the women.

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[14] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 262–263.

[15] See Anderson Bakewell's entry on music in Francine Stone, ed., *Studies on the Tihāmah* (Essex: Longman & Co., 1985). ʿAbdallah al-ʿUmarī's forthcoming *La poésie chantée de la Tihama* (CFAY) will hopefully shed more light on this important question. Dafari speculated that the "*sāḥiliyyāt*" mentioned by al-Khazrajī as a genre cultivated by Ibn Falītah referred to a specifically Tihāman form of poetry. Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 28n5, 29. Tihāmans have their own kind of poetry possessing its own pattern. This area requires further research. Flagg Miller informed me that a great amount of such colloquial poetry exists in private collections in the Tihāmah today.

[16] In classical Arabic, the word "*suwaydā*" means the innermost chamber of the heart or black bile. The fact that it also refers to a generic woman's name and, possibly, to her ethnicity, is attested to by two puns from Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf, *Dīwān (Durar al-aṣdāf min shiʿr yaḥyā b. ibrāhīm jaḥḥāf)* (Codici Vaticani Arabici 1073), 97r: "know that there is a chamber in [my heart], the delightful [girl] called al-Suwaydā" (*wa-ʿlamī ann fīhi ghurfah / rāʾiqah ismuhā l-suwaydāʾ*) and 117v: "Go slowly with the heart that loves you, go slowly, for on its account you now dwell in its innermost chamber. There is no longer any love for pretty girl[s] or slave[s]—look [into it] and see yourself, Suwaydā." (*ruwaydā bi l-fuʾād al-ladhī yahwāk ruwaydā / fa-innak minhu qad ṣirt sākin fī l-suwaydā, fa-mā fīh ḥubb aghyad wa-lā fih ḥubb ʿabdā / wa-fattish in turid an tarā nafsak suwaydā*); P, 237: *suwaydī*—"cant word for a pretty girl"; R.B. Serjeant and Ronald Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ, an Arabian Islamic City* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), 12: *swādah*—name of a female (al-Qafrah, Ḥaydān).

> You leaned over every time you danced, how you bobbed up and down!

The '*dān dān*' refers to the opening trill that marks the singing of Lower Yemen.[17] Levantine Arabic music possesses similar trills such as "*amān amān*" or "*yā laylī yā layl*." The poem also describes a dance. The introduction to one of al-Jaḥḥaf's poems points out the asymmetry of the love affairs that inspired many *ḥumaynī* poems: "He recited [this poem] on a slave girl named Ghazāl whom he wanted to buy but another person took her first" (*wa-qāla fī jāriyatin ismuhā ghazāl arāda shirāhā fa-akhadhahā qablahu ghayruhu*).[18]

Although the people of Lower Yemen seem to have borne the brunt of the *ḥumaynī* poets' satire, a nineteenth-century poet, al-Qārrah, wrote a mock rural *qaṣīdah* about an aloof bedouin girl who speaks in the eastern Yemeni dialect of Māʾrib.[19] In this poem, the beloved's strange pronunciation betrays her foreign origins. The italicized sections of the poem indicate identifiably Eastern Yemeni speech:

> I would give my soul for that young girl, slender like the crescent moon—
> her beauty has captured my soul and my mind,
> A modest woman with no equal among modest women, no! Neither is there one like me among lovers,
> When I asked her for a liaison, she said "what is *liaison* and *what do you want* with liaison? tell me,"
> I said: "Stop that—be generous with it in the dark of night and ennoble my dwelling with your companionship,"
> She said: "It is forbidden for me to visit your place—my people *would not agree to allow me* to do that,
> Also, *my father* and my people would not understand what you say and would *zealously pursue* your death and mine,"
> I said: "By the Prophet I do not fear death! Do not be afraid of death on my account,
> I fear neither sharp swords nor being struck by arrows (unless they are from a glance that rendered my death licit),
> I said: "What is [your] name and what country do you hail from?" She said: "Ghazāl—my root[s are] in the East and it is my lot,

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[17] R.B. Serjeant, *South Arabian Poetry: Prose and Poetry from Ḥaḍramawt* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1983), 23–25; P 162, (*cf.* al-Khafanjī, *Ṣulāfat al-ʿadas wa-lubb al-ʿalas fī l-muḍḥikāt wa l-dalas* (Codici Vaticani Arabici 1413), 72v–73r and *passim*).

[18] Al-Jaḥḥāf, *Dīwān*, 96v.

[19] Aḥmad Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif al-mukhtārah min shiʿr al-khafanjī wa l-qārrah* (No place of publication or publisher, 1985), 139; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 327.

God's East—[a place] *of tenderness and beauty*—so many virgins there look like me,
Since you desire union with me, you will attain it if you *come* with me to the country,
I said: "God, help me while [my] tears [are] streaming down—how can I leave my people when I am not permitted to do so?"
She said: "Judgement is love's—if you find the place you go there, if not, leave me to my path,[20]
I said: "Woe for the sweet and licitly magical speech—and woe is me, I am totally enslaved,
Don't you see, Ghazāl, that I am [as thin] as an apparition, from your love, which has become my preoccupation?
As long as God sends rains upon the mountains—east, west, and north,
May a thousand greetings and prayers meet the Prophet, the highest example of humankind.

In *ḥumaynī ghazal*, a poet's use of a "foreign" dialect might be as little as only one word or the definite article "*alif-mim*." In the *ḥumaynī* poetry of the eighteenth century and beyond, a new attitude towards dialect emerged. During this time, a group of *avant garde* poets began to grapple with linguistic and cultural difference in new and sophisticated ways. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī (d. 1766/1767) served as the pole star of this group.[21] He called his sitting room in Ṣanʿāʾ "*al-Safīnah*." Since *al-Safīnah* could be intended in its classical sense as a ship, it was as if the meetings' participants were embarking on a journey together. At the same time, the word *al-Safīnah* also meant a scrapbook of poetry, primarily containing *ḥumaynī* verse.

Heteroglossia was the dominant feature of this new movement in *ḥumaynī* poetry. The concatenation "*ʿalā lughat* (*fulān*)" can be found in Yemeni texts predating this period. Some poets or editors of poetic *dīwān*s use the phrase to introduce poems that the poet had written on behalf of the mentioned person. The phrase also introduces antagonistic pieces—a meaning possibly hinted at by the preposition *ʿalā*—that mock somebody. For example, a poem of al-Khafanjī's mocks the ugliness and

[20] From this point the text is in Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, but not in Sharaf al-Dīn.

[21] It is my opinion that the lack of a critical edition of al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* is the most important desideratum in the study of Yemeni vernacular literature. I hope to prepare one, pending access to the six versions of the *dīwān* in the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿā's collection (Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Malīḥ and Aḥmad Muḥammad ʿĪsā, *Fihris makhṭūṭāt al-maktabah al-gharbiyyah bi l-jāmiʿ al-kabīr bi-ṣanʿāʾ* (Alexandria: Mansha'at al-maʿārif, n.d.), 484, 599, 606).

poverty of a certain *faqih* ʿĀmir, who plugs up the roof with his hand to keep the rain out of his ramshackle house in al-Radāʿ.[22]

Poems written "in the language of a group of people" (*alāʾ lughat*…) also predominate in this period. The *qāḍī* ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī (d. 1726/1727), who was stationed as a judge in the Tihāmah, may have been the forebear of such poems. His *dīwān* contains a number of bitter poems ("*ʿalāʾ lughat ahli tihāmah*")[23] that emphasize the boorishness of the local populace. He writes:

> My companions and I will leave tomorrow for the mountains, I do not desire the coast.
> Woe is me—my lord gave me a meaningful glance but I did not know what it meant,
>
> I don't want a beauty or your dwellings—the mountains and the Prophet's abode are my goal,
> My bird is superior to yours—your bird is Tihāmī, while mine is from Najd,
>
> Would that I could see the mountain people and complain about your windy heat,
> By God, if you [addressing the hot wind] touched [the highlands] no one in the mountains would drink sweet water anymore.
>
> I drank among a people but remained thirsty, the[ir] brine never slakes my thirst.
> I was happy to cry with exhaustion so I could drink the tears from my eyes.
>
> O people, by God give regards to the westerners,
> Say: my absence troubles you [but] my grief over losing you is a triumph [indeed].
>
> To smell the grasses and the crops in the blooming gardens!
> Now my tears flood out for you and I am suffering.[24]

The language of this poem has a rustic sound, as in the opening line: "*shābūk anā wa m-rifāq bukrah*." Its haughty tone is shared with most of the other poems of this nature in ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī's *dīwān*.

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[22] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 93r.

[23] The manuscript copy of the *dīwān* of ʿAli b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsi at the Western Mosque Library in Ṣanʿāʾ introduces this poem by saying "this poem is also his (may God have mercy on him) and he recited it while he was in the port city of Zabīd, in *their* language" (*wa-lahu raḥimahu llāhu taʿālā wa-huwa fi bandar zabīd ʿala lughatihim*) ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī, *Dīwān al-ʿansi* (MS Western Mosque Library, *adab* 41), 33v.

[24] ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah and Ṣanʿāʾ: Dār al-Kalimah, n.d.), 60–61.

Less uniformly negative views of the Tihāmah can be found in the poems where the speaker, while overjoyed at the prospect of leaving the Tihāmah, regrets parting from his beloved.[25] Nevertheless, a sense of elitist outrage at having to live in a backwater animates these poems. Al-ʿAnsī had the following to say about rural Sharʿab:

> O gentle one, when I descended to coarse-mannered Sharʿab,
> Its thickness of spirit overwhelmed my refined nature and wore me out.
> If I had seen [my nature] being Sharʿabized, [made] feeble-minded, rough, and soldier-like,
> I would have said to it "after what I have been, how could you have lost all semblance of love?"
>
> Sir, my speech will not return to what it once was,
> Nor my discourse which, if you had heard it [long ago], would have made you forget Fate's trials.
> My poetry that I used to consort with has withered; I am worthless,
> He said: "I would rather shave off my beard than return to the rocky Ṣaʿīd."[26]
>
> I swear by he who ennobled Medina, and who detested bedouin and crude peasants,
> If Jamīl[27] alighted in this accursed and crass town with its poor views,
> Buthaynah would not have stirred his heart, dragging his tormented soul behind [her],
> And he would never have loved her even if she ransomed off her husband and spread out a bed for him.
>
> The only one who is content with my coarse disposition, my place in life, is the wind,
> Until it leaves me alone and afflicted, without conversation or companion…[28]

A century later, the Imāmic authorities posted the *qāḍī* and poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī in Ḥays, a town in the southern Tihāmah. Confronting his situation, al-Ānisī seems to have drawn inspiration from al-ʿAnsī, for he composed several poems that use the Tihāman dialect.[29] He wrote this *muwashshaḥ* against Ḥays:

> [Here] bats bother men with their screeching and their stench.
> Every mosque is poorly lit and is full of their odor.

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[25] E.g., al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr*, 56, 61.
[26] The word "*ṣaʿīd*" refers to Lower Yemen. Al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr*, 62n2.
[27] A reference to the *ʿudhrī* poet Jamīl b. Maʿmar.
[28] Al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr*, 63.
[29] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 65.

> [Ḥays's] market is a wasteland (except for al-Mifḥār where you can find half a camel-load of goods).
> They have a great deal of perfume, pepper or ginger,
> But no tailor is to be found, or a builder other than one who is passing through.
> There are no schoolmasters, literati, or wise men.
>
> They are all naked beggars and peasants with neither turbans nor lovely cloaks—Can you change them?
>
> Whenever you see them you become perplexed, robbed of your certainty.
> You would say of these people that they were *jinn* or the People of al-Raqīm.[30]
>
> They are all the same—ugly in their misfortune.
> Their most valuable possessions are the flood-bucket, millet and sorghum seeds.
> I am amazed that taxes can be demanded from such wretchedly poor people.
> It is an injustice that kindles flames within them—God have mercy.
>
> Iblīs himself jumps when he sees the old women wearing their *bashkīr*s go down to the well.
> Are they dressing to attract or to repel?[31]

The poem concludes with the following words: "No one would come to Ḥays except one who has wandered off and become hopelessly lost, Verily, it is where Satan fell when he was thrown out of the Garden."[32] Other than the hint of empathy in the lines where the poet wonders why the poor are taxed so heavily, the poem is scathing. A number of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī's poems provide more positive experiences of the Tihāmah, either in depicting vignettes on love affairs, or in two poems that deal with a journey.[33] The first of these is prefaced with the words, "From what [the poet] said (may God have mercy on him) on the date harvest of the year 1781/1782." What follows is an unusual travel poem:

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[30] Qurʾān 18:9.
[31] Al-Ānisī, *Tarjīʿ al-aṭyār*, 213.
[32] Ibid., 216.
[33] A similar pose was struck by the nineteenth-century poet al-Muftī, a Sanʿānī *qāḍī* sent to Mocha. He composed a poem in praise of "*ghizlān al-makhā*" but yearned to return to his home town. He wrote: "*wa-nasʾaluh allāh taʿālā ʿawdanā min tihāmah ilā safḥ ṣanʿāʾ al-yaman*" (al-Muftī, *Ṣanʿāʾ ḥawat kull fann*, 27).

The clappers were struck, arousing those overtaken by heedlessness,
From under the night-traveling howdahs they drove on the young camels (for it),
They passed the night away with only the darkness, moving on to the sound of camel-songs and melodies.
These plantations bring what all people desire:

Drooping clusters holding many ripe and ready to pick [dates].
The daughter of the flask bottled by Persians long ago
does not touch it, nor wine mixed with copious amounts of honey,
Nothing comes close other than the lover's imbibing from his beloved's mouth.

Its yellows are unalloyed gold, its reds Yemeni agates,
Its greens choice emeralds, and its whites pearls.
Its black is breathtaking—like the prayers on the night when
al-ʿIyānī[34] was martyred.
Every precious thing is gathered for the people, whether they deserve it or not.

There is no one here to take us to al-Aṣlaʿ or Hāshim.
They go to Ḥabīb and al-Mazraʿ bin Jābir without sleeping.
They approach al-Usayqī as dawn breaks.
Twilight grows drowsy, a bird warbles, and a cool humid wind blows.

From al-Kidāḥ we glimpsed al-Suḥārī—there was not a withered tree among its palms,
To the right was Janāḥ and to the left Bū Zahr and Ibn Maḥmūd,

We were happy to relax there and lose our burdens,
Our worries were hidden away and effaced in that place.

The air there is amazing, the water sweet and cold,
[Its land] is pure and clean, soft to the touch, and it is easy to sleep there,
How lofty it appears when the sea below you marshals its armies,
The wave bravely advances and you can hear the sound of its footsteps and its running [in pursuit of the enemy].

In the evening you see it churning with a yellow cloak,
Morning takes this color away and veils it in green,
Blessed be the Exalted, Who created it after non-existence and subjugated it [to humankind].
An ornament to him who wears it, [providing] delicious fresh fish.[35]

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[34] Al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī al-ʿIyānī, an eleventh-century Zaydī Imām.

[35] *Cf* Qurʾān 35:12—"*Wa-mā yastawī l-baḥrāni hādhā ʿadhbun furātun sāʾighun sharābuhu wa-hādhā milḥun ʾujājun wa-min kullin taʾkulūna laḥman ṭariyyan wa-tastakhrijūna ḥilyatan talbasūnahā wa-tarā l-fulka fīhi mawākhira li-tabtaghū ʾ min*

As for the palm, he who approaches it can relax his spirit and his worries will flee,
An old man [resting among] its hills is like a playful white gazelle,
His youth has returned to him—his wood becomes green again and his branches sprout leaves,
There the soul is at peace and the mind forgets every burden.

The tuneful nightingale in the boughs mimics melodies,
Chirping artfully, not sleeping along with the rest of Creation.
Musical nightingale, by God you must be a lover or a parter,
A troubled one does not exert himself thus without a cause.

What a place in which to repose, giving the eyes respite from the things that they see,
The sun is bright there but the dates keep ripening,[36]
I swear that the palms of al-Suḥārī bewitch every one who goes there,
Neither Naʿmān nor Wādī Zabīd can approach it.

O God, free it from the reprehensible innovations of bats[37] and palm-guardians,
May [its dates] be appraised by the expert at a high price,
And may they be freed from the market after the yelling of the merchant,
May its irrigation ditches be filled with torrents of water and with dew.

The poem follows a date crop to market, detailing the stopping points along the way. In this poem, Tihāman words exoticize the poem's landscape, evoking a sense of wonder rather than providing ethnic humor. Stylistically, the poem incorporates these dialectical elements in a less obtrusive manner than the Tihāman poems of al-ʿAnsī, which lack syntactic clarity. Thematically, dialect expresses a wider and more nuanced range of experience. Snobbishness is still a dominant point-of-view, to be sure, but this element of ethnographic discovery is new. This may be due to the influence of the Safīnah circle in the eighteenth century and its founder, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī.

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faḍlihi wa-laʿallakum tashkurūn." N.J. Dawood: "The two seas are not alike. The one is fresh, sweet, and pleasant to drink from, while the other is salt and bitter. From both you eat fresh fish and bring up ornaments to deck yourselves with. See how the ships plough their course through them as you sail away to seek His bounty. Perchance you will give thanks."

[36] "*Awqātih ghurar lākin saʿāt al-shurūq zāʾid*". This seems to be a pun on a meaning of "*shurūq*" in classical Arabic: "to show ripening dates."

[37] P, 368: This is a Tihaman word.

The "Safīnah Circle" and Heteroglossia

Several scholars have noted al-Khafanjī's importance. For Yemenis like Aḥmad Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn or for Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Manṣūr[38] (1915–), compiler of the November 1969 copy of al-Khafanjī's *dīwān*, al-Khafanjī's *oeuvre* was worth studying merely because it preserves the spoken dialect of eighteenth-century Ṣanʿāʾ.[39] However, Dafari and Taminian argue that al-Khafanjī's work also has literary value. Taminian, quoting a poem of al-Khafanjī's that mocks the traditional Zaydī curriculum, argues that *ḥumaynī* poetry is a poetry of rebellion.[40] Although she overstates her claim by extending it to all of *ḥumaynī* poetry, she is correct in that al-Khafanjī's poetry manifests a strongly contrarian spirit.

A significant portion of al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* consists of humorous renderings of the popular songs (*ḥumaynī mubayyatāt* and *muwashshaḥāt*) of his day. Only a few of them can be matched to extant originals. The *dīwān* also contains original poems in *muwashshaḥ*, *mubayyat*, rural *qaṣīdah* forms, poetic correspondences, the work of other poets, and a *maqāmah*. Dafari aptly describes his work as a revolt against *ḥumaynī* poetry's repetitiveness and its "vulgar sentimentalism."[41] He writes, "[I]n most of the poems included, al-Khufanjī [*sic*] made ample use of the colloquial diction…."[42] Dafari believes that Khafanjī was the first known poet to make frequent use of the colloquial in the *muwashshaḥ* and the first to equate *ḥumaynī* and *hazl*.[43]

However, Dafari errs in his assessment of al-Khafanjī on several fronts. In the first place, he sees Khafanjī's dependence on dialect as a

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[38] Muḥammad al-Zabārah, *Nuzhat al-naẓar fī rijāl al-qarn al-rābiʿ ʿashar* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-abḥāth al-yamaniyyah, 1979), 580; Abd al-Salām b. ʿAbbās al-Wajīh, *Aʿlām al-muʾallifīn al-zaydiyyah* (McLean,Virginia: Imām Zaid bin Ali Cultural Foundation, 1999), 987–988. Al-Manṣūr was Imām Aḥmad Ḥamīd al-Dīn's (d. 1962) representative in Egypt in the *wizārat al-ittiḥād bayna miṣr wa l-yaman*. After the Revolution he served in various ministerial positions. After Unification he led the Ḥizb al-ḥaqq al-islāmī party.

[39] AR, 208–210; Taminian, "Playing with words," 133; See also Sharaf al-Dīn's introduction to *al-Ṭarāʾif al-mukhtārah*. Jean Lambert also concentrated on the lexicographical importance of al-Khafanjī's poetry in his "Aspects de la poesie dialectale au yemen" (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Paris, 1982), 9.

[40] Taminian, "Playing with Words," 136.

[41] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 256.

[42] Ibid., 258.

[43] Ibid., 259.

bid for popularity with the common people.[44] (Dafari, remember, finds too much dialect in *ḥumaynī* poetry to be annoying.) In the second place, he interprets Khafanjī's poetry as biography, arguing that it is a "mirror of his life and his age."[45] Along these lines, the contemptuous attitude towards Islamic piety and the sexually explicit homoeroticism that emerge in al-Khafanjī's poetry can only be, at best, the product of a poet "prone to less respectable ways of life" and, at worst, "a buffoon."[46]

Heteroglossia in the Bakhtinian sense (*raznorečie*) stands as the dominant trait of the literature that emerged from the Safīnah circle—particularly the poetry of al-Khafanjī. These poems use a pastiche of Arabic dialects, linguistic registers of Arabic, and several foreign languages that one would have heard in eighteenth-century Ṣanʿā': Ṣanʿānī, classical Arabic, dialects of tribes from north and west of Ṣanʿā, Turkish, and even a little Hebrew. In addition, these poems also incorporate the way women, farmers, or soldiers spoke.

By using this wide variety of dialects, the Safīnah circle poets produced a sophisticated body of satire. For al-Khafanjī in particular, dialects provided opportunities for parodying several genres of writing. *Ḥumaynī ghazal* was the most common target for his acidic burlesques, but al-Khafanjī also derided panegyric, scholarly self-praise, and boasting matches.

For example, the following poem by al-Khafanjī imitates the song, "O people, what recourse have I to strategems?" (*yā nās mā ḥīlatī*):

> My companion stomped on my pelvis[47]—O sky, don't fall down!
> When he grabbed my hips [it looked as if] he went to fetch a jug of water,[48]
> But my own drunkenness was churned up by a beauty with sweet red [lips],
> And my companion spoiled my tipsiness with sweat and heat.
>
> [My] beloved is still a tribesman.
> His speech is Bakīlī.[49]

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[44] Ibid., 258.
[45] Ibid., 256.
[46] Ibid., 23, 257.
[47] P, 151: *dasʿa*—walking or type of dance. The word also denotes the rhythm used in the first section of the *qawmah* suite and thus the first section of the Yemeni *muwashshaḥ*.
[48] A explained that the *kūz*, a smallish vessel used in Ṣanʿā a long time ago for carrying water, had a faintly hourglass shape that might explain this image.
[49] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 14r. Bakīl and Ḥāshid are the two confederations of Yemenī tribes.

He is my regular customer all day long,
and he dances the *bāl bāl* with me.[50]

If my friends saw him, shooting glances whenever [he wanted],
They would not disapprove of my passion, [as] respectable men of propriety.

He hunted me in the chicken coops, with eyes full of words,
acting like the [meaning unclear] that shoots without arrows.
Because they are bowls, for preparing hunted pigeons.
For the sake of a love-struck heart, you play hide and seek.

Whether on account of the slanderers or on account of me,
don't turn away from my grief.
Love's gate is my gate,
I will knock on it by myself.

I spread out my goatskin for him, and may there be trouble for the blamer!
If he tested my love he would have died inconspicuously.

With the love of a country gazelle, a fawn from around Khubbān,[51]
His patch is full of locusts, and his beard is a horse's tail,
Beauty marks [nest] like ticks on his moon-like cheeks,
But love is my vocation, and the seed of my love grew,[52]

In the Jirādī neighborhood,
my heart is hidden away.

This *muwashshaḥ* parodies *ḥumaynī ghazal* on several levels. In the liberal use of vernacular and earthy words, such as "sweat," "chicken coop," and "vermin," the vocabulary of this poem contrasts with the refined language of *ghazal*. Thematically, the poem also deliberately parodies *ghazal*: the object of the speaker's affection is not a coquettish servant, but an ugly drunken Bakīlī tribesman.[53] The parody of *ghazal* seems most extreme in the verse that compares his eyes to bowls of cooked fowl and in the dead pigeons ("*ṣayd al-ḥamām*"), which inevitably

[50] P, 45: *bālah*—"a popular song sung in the moonlight by a group of men and women dancing in two rows facing one another. While approaching and receding, they sing '*yā l-bālah wa l-layleh al-bāl*'. *Bāl bāl bālī*—rhyme of Ṣanʿānī songs called also Ṣanʿānī."

[51] A: Its inhabitants are the target of derision from Ṣanʿānī people.

[52] Puns on "*ḥubb*" (love) and "*ḥabbah*" (seed/a grain)—this appears elsewhere in the *dīwān*.

[53] On tribesmen in the work of al-Khafanjī and others see Mark Wagner, "Changing Visions of the Tribesman in Yemeni Vernacular Literature," in *al-Masar—fikriyyah thaqafiyyah* 15 (2004): 3–30.

remind the listener of the ubiquitous doves of *ḥumaynī ghazal* (and classical Arabic *ghazal*).

The sexual explicitness of much of the Safīnah circle's poetry serves a purpose in their collective literary project. Julie Scott Meisami interprets Arabic *mujūn* poetry as a parody of courtly *ghazal*.[54] Their reliance upon dialect makes the poets of the Safīnah circle heirs to the Andalusian *zajal*. In the *azjāl* of Ibn Quzmān, argues James T. Monroe, the depiction of a stylized underworld uses both sexual explicitness and dialect to make a travesty of *ghazal*.[55] Since *ḥumaynī ghazal* already contains a dialectical element, the poetry of the Safīnah circle could be viewed as manneristic poetry, expanding and igniting the dialectical linguistic form of the tradition.

Al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* describes the following poem of his as a poetic imitation (*muʿāraḍah*) of "O songbird, are you complaining of a problem?" (*wā-mugharrid ʿalā a*[*m*]*-mushkil hal ashjayt*):[56]

> By the fawn of the tribes, bring forth what I have given you. Do you have a few sorghum heads of Jihrān?[57]
> You have taken what you pleased of sorghum husks—how many sheaves will remain?
> She is a wonder when she goes by, and when she is generous, [when] you stoop down [and when she] fills up jugs of water from the pools.[58]
> Then you carry down the sieves slowly, sometimes you go up and sometimes you go down.
>
> A wild calf from ʿIyāl Sanḥān (a tribe), lovely, a beauty from the land of ʿAmrān, [her name is] Zaynab.
> In Raḥḥān she is a ruler, she lives in Yiʿfur Ḍawrān, and she is amazing,
> How she harvests my [crops] in the land of Hamdān, crying out that she is being stoned by Satan, then she departs.
> You can see a fine vintage in her wine cup (figuratively: mouth), on which every learned Jew has made a legal ruling, and she is beautiful.

This poem's most prominent feature is its unusual choice of beloved. Instead of admiring the graceful movements of the wine-pourer, the speaker admires his tenant farmer as she goes about drawing water

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[54] "Arabic *Mujūn* Poetry: The Literary Dimension," in *Verse and the Fair Sex: Studies in Arabic Poetry and the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature*, ed. Frederick de Jong (Utrecht: M.Th. Houtsma Stichting), 8–30.

[55] James T. Monroe, "Hispano-Arabic Poetry During the Almoravid Period: Theory and Practice," in *Viator* 4, (1973): 65–95.

[56] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 186v.

[57] *Jihrān*: a fertile plain between Yarīm and Maʿbar.

[58] Again, this may compare the hourglass shape of the *kūz* to the beloved's shape.

and harvesting sorghum. By focusing so intently on the movements of this unusual object of affection, this poet caricatures these typically hyperbolic descriptions in *ghazal*. The poem also caricatures *ghazal* in another way: by depicting the farmer's rent as a love gift.

The following poem describes an equally unlikely love interest: a Jew.

> A fawn from among the Jews stalked my heart. He has a face like the rising moon,
> and his cheeks have blossomed with roses. I wish that he were generous with his favors.
>
> He has scarified spots[59] adorning his cheeks and his eyes enchant lovers. How many a lover has been given as a pledge to them, tears streaming down his cheeks like a storm.
>
> When I saw him inside the synagogue—how wonderful he was! I saw him and tried to get his attention.
> He chanted his melody like David—when he read the Torah you could see him nod his head.
>
> I cannot find one who is like him in beauty with his black sidelocks hanging down.
> He has become as slender as a ripe sorghum stalk—and he has wine in his cool mouth.
>
> A swaying branch held in a sand hill, his white and pearly teeth flash,
> He has taken me prisoner with his miraculous gaze, a gazelle whose glance takes lions captive.
>
> Would that he became a Muslim and was rightly guided,[60] then entered the religion of Aḥmad.
> [If he] followed the religion of Islam and there is no doubt that he would win great happiness.

This short *ghazal* by al-Khafanjī conveys several popular ideas that Yemeni Muslims had about Jews.[61] The youth's face is "like the rising

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[59] *Mashālī*—P, 265, 403; I, 514–515; Carsten Niebuhr wrote: "The women of Yemen also make black punctures in their face to improve their beauty." *Travels Through Arabia* (1792; repr. Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1994), 2:236.

[60] *Yuhtadī*—a verb used in Yemen to describe Jewish conversion to Islam. Given the popular etymology of the word Jew "*yahūdī*" as being derived from the root "*h.d.w*," this verb might allude cleverly to the suspicion of a convert's potential for religious recidivism. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 3:291.

[61] See Mark Wagner, "Infidels, Lovers and Magicians: Portrayals of Jews in Yemeni Arabic Poetry, 17th–19th c.," in *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Professor Yosef Tobi*, ed. Dani Bar Maʿoz and Ayelet Ettinger, Haifa University Press (forthcoming).

moon" with cheeks that "have blossomed with roses." When referring to a Jew, the word "face" (*muḥayyā*) may have called to mind the word "wine" (*muḥayyā*), because Yemeni Jews sold wine surreptitiously to Muslims. Both the description of the Jew's cheeks, flushed from drinking, and the image of "cool wine in his mouth" may have strengthened this association.

When chanting, the Jew "nods" his head (*yinūd*). The verb "*nād/yanūd*" means "to nod [the] head with sleepiness" in *fuṣḥā*. In the vernacular, the word means "to shake with illness."[62] This may represent a diglossic *double entendre* that alludes to the Yemeni Muslim popular belief that Jews wrapped phylacteries around themselves every day to bandage themselves because they were ill.[63] The conventional piety that rounds out the poem may not be quite as conventional as it seems. Because in al-Khafanjī's poetry, Aḥmad is one of the names of the young male beloved, the phrase "religion of Aḥmad" (*dīn aḥmadī*) may refer to this character rather than to the Prophet.[64] The effect would be to say, "would that you were converted from your chaste behavior to Aḥmad's profligacy."

Another of al-Khafanjī's poems that includes Jewish characters incorporates puns that are based on Hebrew and Arabic words used by Jews. It begins, "A Jewish woman was passing by, dressed in a white garment—curse her, for she pissed herself." Only Jews use the expression "*yiḥrīm*" ("curse"), which comes from the Hebrew *ḥerem*—"ban of excommunication." Another example of this can be found in a verse describing a beloved with the Jewish name Nāḥum: "In your smile I [receive] two jugs of wine—[your] eye[s] are impure but your cheek[s] are kosher food."[65] His cheeks are described as "*kūshūr*." Given the antithesis with "ritual impurity" (*najas*), this can only be a rendering of the Hebrew *kasher* (kosher). Again, this verse emphasizes the association between Jews and wine ("In your smile I [receive] jugs of wine").

Al-Khafanjī describes one of his poems as having been composed "in the language of [the tribe of] *Ḥuḍūr*" *(ʿalā lughat ḥuḍūr).*[66] This

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[62] P, 497–8.

[63] Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 539n83; P, 364: "*sāʿ al-yahawdī al-maftūj*" (Like a Jew with a bandaged head).

[64] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 152v.

[65] "*Wa-lī fī mabsamak dannayn / najāsat ʿaynwa-kūshūr al-khudūd qūtu.*"

[66] A mountain in the area of al-Bustān, west of Ṣanʿāʾ. Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 1:276–277. A: the citizens of Ṣanʿāʾ still find the people of Ḥuḍūr to be a fitting subject for ridicule.

description suggests that the poem includes both a specific rural dialect and a characterization of a tribe. The speaker recites:

> Ibn Miʿṣār[67] said, responding to the frightening poem that arrived from his kinsman from Musayyab,
> It contained speech that would have enchanted a rock, [were it able to read]—and as for a man, it would smite him with love,
> It is in our nature, O Ḥuḍūr, not to tire ourselves in [the composition of] poetry or work songs,[68] nor in singing or playing the pipe,
> We only [busy ourselves with] bullets hotter than burning embers and spears [that would make one] seek protection from certain death,[69]
> Would that you had seen [us] the day we encountered the companions of ʿAbd al-Rabb[70] at the gate of Yifrus while Yāqūt was in Jiblah,
> You would say that our raiding them was [like] a rising star—they did not know about our presence until we had sneaked up on them,
> By the name of God, today we will abase our enemies[71]—we will stick more than forty penises in them!
> I think the first of them [ʿAbd al-Rabb] flees towards Sharʿab while we, already in al-Ṣafī,[72] follow in hot pursuit,
> We will return, dragging ourselves—some arrive stumbling, [practically] asleep with fatigue,
> I left you to take out a quarter measure of grain—by God we will make porridge and eat tonight!
> In the morning we will return to making battle—when we arrive half of them are trapped, as if in a thicket,
> We arrive as supplicants, but negotiate in bad faith, we will sew up the affair for them and may God let it be a fine piece of work![73]
> We will scrutinize the situation intensely, then make a promise, sending missives back and forth in jest with Ṣāliḥ, the lord of the plateau,[74]

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[67] A: This is a stereotypical tribesman's name.

[68] *Hajlih*, P, 505, strophic songs sung at sorghum harvest; *hājil*—marching chants. A: This category includes tribal songs sung at weddings and festivals and the *zāmil*.

[69] Literally "at the time one turns toward Mecca." A: when a person is about to die, their body is pointed towards Mecca. The phrase "*waqʿat al-qibleh*" means "about to die."

[70] This almost certainly refers to the activities of the rebels Yāqūt al-Zaylaʿī in 1739/1740–1741/1742, and *shaykh* ʿAbd al-Rabb b. Aḥmad in 1745/1746. Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Taʾrīkh ahl al-kisāʾ* (published as *Taʾrīkh al-yaman ʿaṣr al-istiqlāl ʿan al-ḥukm al-ʿuthmānī al-awwal min sanat 1056 ilāʾ sanat 1160 H.*) ed. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-Mufaḍḍal Offset Printers, 1990), 475–483, 496–497.

[71] A possible translation of the verse could be: "By the name of God, we will set up a chopping block to abase our enemies and they will lose more than forty penises (or testicles)." See Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 239n133.

[72] Reading "al-Ṣafī" instead of "*al-aṣfī*." Al-Ṣafī is a place near Ibb. Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ al-buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 2:480.

[73] The second hemistich relies on puns between sewing and strategy.

[74] The interpretation behind my translation of this couplet is Z's.

> But we did not realize that it was noon until we heard a loud noise from their camp—I said "by God something here is one-legged" (i.e., we have a problem),
> Soon al-Ẓarīf arrived, calling for ʿArhab—[the latter] said to him that our companions were planning to leave,
> They all came, ready, to Marḥab[75] and there was no escape from them.[76]

Here, conniving Ḥuḍūrī soldiers present themselves as barbarians. They negotiate in bad faith, but because they oversleep, they fail to go through with their scheme. At this point, the poem turns to the Ḥuḍūrī soldier's invective against the chieftain of the tribe of Arḥab:

> Do not let the lord of the land of Arḥab provoke you, He does not look menacing once he throws off his wool shawl,
> If, one day, you see him with the rolls of his waist-wrapper undone you would think: "is this the soldier who makes war on villages?"
> He is a little donkey who would sell his own head [for] a stinging insect [i.e., an insignificant thing] and his companions resemble what gets farted over a big pile of shit,
> We are the ones who don't tire in the midst of clamor and the fray and you will not see us shirking from the regime's war…

Here, scatalogical language underscores the coarseness of the tribesman. The final line satirizes the Imāmic regime for relying on tribal levies.[77] On one level, the poem is a humorous commentary on the current events of mid-eighteenth-century Yemen. The poem as a whole can also be viewed as a parody of a common form of classical poetry in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Yemen: the panegyric that praised the Imām, then recounted his military victory over those who opposed his authority, usually tribesmen.[78] Instead of depicting victory as the reward for the righteous Imām, however, this poem chronicles a victory achieved by an unsavory band of mercenaries.

This wasn't the only poem of its kind that al-Khafanjī composed. In a poetic exchange between al-Khafanjī and ʿAbdallah al-Shāmī, al-Khafanjī begins with a martial ode "in the language of Ḥuḍūr" (*ʿalā*

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[75] P, 177: A *wādī* and a castle east of Kibs.

[76] This reading assumes "*fatlah*" to be the copyist's mistake for "*faltah*." A: Ṣanʿānī mothers tell their children "*wi-lā mā rāḥat lak*," meaning "even if you escape I will still punish you."

[77] Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 47–48.

[78] The *fuṣḥā dīwān* of the nineteenth-century poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, *Dīwān al-unmūdhaj al-fāʾiq li l-naẓm al-rāʾiq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Walī al-Shamīrī (Ṣanʿāʾ: Muʾassasat al-ibdāʿ li l-thaqāfah wa l-ādāb, 1999) is full of such poems.

lughat ḥuḍūr) much like the above poem.[79] Al-Shāmī's response, the first part of which consists of a humorous description of al-Khafanjī's physical appearance, was composed "in the language of the [tribe of] Banū l-Ḥārith" (*ʿalā lughat banī l-ḥārith*). Poems such as these that purport to speak in the voice of a particular tribe beg the question of the relationship between al-Khafanjī and his poetic compatriots, who are cosmopolitan elitists, to the rural tribes and their poetry. The tone of mockery and derision that characterizes the poem "in the language of Ḥuḍūr" can be found in spades in another poem written by both al-Khafanjī and al-Shāmī. Al-Khafanjī supplies the first verse: "The tribesman's asshole would not call for saddling[80] were it not for the fact that he takes shelter under the donkey."[81] The remainder of the poem, composed by al-Shāmī, offers a catalogue of the tribesman's faults: he is animalistic, amoral, uncharitable, irreligious, obsequious, and unable to relax. In short, the tribesman is the antithesis of the type of man welcome to al-Khafanjī's salon.

Al-Khafanjī also wrote several poems whose humor revolved around the distinctive speech patterns of women.[82] In the following poem, al-Khafanjī takes the established genre of "boasting matches" (*mufākharāt*) between two villages just outside Ṣanʿāʾ, al-Rawḍah, and Biʾr al-ʿAzab, and causes it to degenerate into a quarrel between two women.[83]

> Biʾr al-ʿAzab said to Aḥmad's Garden (al-Rawḍah): "We have a bathhouse and sturdy buildings,

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[79] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 83v–84r; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 49–50.

[80] "*Dhafar*" means "stench" in classical Arabic. In Yemen it refers to tying a rope under the base of a beast of burden's tail in order to fasten goods to its back (P). It may also have a (homo)sexual connotation. Compare Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 85.

[81] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 113r; AR, 188; Ismāʿīl al-Akwaʿ, *Hijar al-ʿilm wa-maʿāqiluhā fī l-yaman* (Damascus: Dār al-fikr, 1995), 1665–1668.

[82] In many (if not all) regions of Yemen, the exclusion of women from the public sphere has led to a linguistic situation whereby certain expressions and words are designated specifically for the use of women.

[83] Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 27–34; al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 20v–22r. This poem can be found in a number of works: al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yaman wa-qabāʾilihā*, 2:507–510; al-Ḥajrī, *Masājid ṣanʿāʾ* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Wizārat al-maʿārif, 1941/1942), 73–76; Muḥammad Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf li-nubalāʾ al-yaman baʿd al-alf ilāʾ 1357 hijriyyah* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-buḥūth wa l-dirāsāt al-yamani, 1985), 2:179–182. The poem also appears in a number of other works. The classic representative of the genre of boasting matches between towns is ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlī al-Wazīr's (d. 1734/1735) *Aqrāṭ al-dhahab fī l-mufākharah bayn al-rawḍah wa-biʾr al-ʿazab*, ed. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-Dār al-yamaniyyah li l-nashr wa l-tawzīʿ, 1986).

Nightingales chirp in our courtyards while clouds settle in above us and thunder,
Old lady of the Autumn-harvested grapes, examine what features and wonders you have,
Whoever walks down al-Makhālif Street (in al-Rawḍah) is met by a ghoul in the lengthening dark."[84]

Al-Rawḍah answered sweetly: "We are equals, O succubus of al-Quzālī,"[85]
By God, the one who is before me should get herself behind me—you don't have a single cluster of white grapes,
Nor the "*Rāziqī*" variety—only gold-colored [grapes] that look like the grapes [that come from] soft soil,
A breakfast of them would be worth a thousand *qirsh*—they are worth their weight in gold."

Biʾr al-ʿAzab responded in haste, saying, "I possess all of the enchanting beauty,
I have a good reputation among all of those whose grapes are harvested in the Fall—these relationships are renewed every day,
As for grapes, they are found in [my] country, and [my] wood has amber—now our friendliness is gone,
All of this goes beyond self-praise and your breakfast will be trouble."

al-Rawḍah said: "You are praising yourself over me? You reproached me and you want to drive me away?
You rebuke me incessantly while al-Jirāf[86] judges between us?
I am the place where Ḥātim alighted and I am happy every day.
My Friday mosque contains crowds, [notable] people and more."
Biʾr al-ʿAzab responded with a guffaw and strutted flirtatiously,
She said: "I have a bathhouse, a marketplace, and a street, a caravanserai for Hindu merchants (Bāniyān) and a place where inventory is taken,
What use is bragging about mosques when every kneeling worshipper prostrates himself in the dark?
I will praise a swaying branch on which a black bird sings out its secrets."

al-Rawḍah said: "What a piece of work you are you shameless garbage-picker!
You dull-witted feather brain—the Jews use you as their thoroughfare and meeting place.

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[84] Or "in the alley" according to the MS Vatican reading: *ziqāq*.

[85] Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 133: A mixed (Muslim and Jewish) neighborhood in Ṣanʿā'. Given this fact, as well as the semantic similarity of al-Quzālī and *qazl* (illicit affair), this statement might be derogatory.

[86] A town just north of Ṣanʿā'. Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 1:182–183.

I know that you are not even an inhabited place—what is your obsession with caravanserais?
Where do you get [the nerve] to brag—you and Umm Qālid[87] with your skinny face."

She replied: "You cannot [even] be counted among old women with your cheeks that look like fried fatty sheep's tails,
Wrinkles crisscross your forehead—a sluggish woman[88] is as heavy as a packed saddle,

Don't brag about [your] little ones, mama—the lady of the house is not like the serving girl,
Patchy curls are not like locks of hair and gold-embroidered silk is not like an old rag."

Al-Rawḍah said, speaking sagely: "The words of children do not diminish the wise,
I, for one, am full of fear of God and self-control—children cannot provoke me with careless talk,
My grape arbors are fed by a torrential stream and wild artichoke shoots have set themselves on its banks,
I have al-Zarjilih and Biʾr Jawwāl (wells) and [your] quarter drinks from them and becomes quarrelsome."

Biʾr al-ʿAzab answered equitably: "If you have one stream I have one thousand,
Don't come back you babbling crone—Is that your forehead or a burning trench?
My air is more delicate than wine and doves warble in my branches,
Clouds weep over my gardens but you are merely a tribeswoman of the provinces."

Al-Rawḍah said: "This is enough—this fire is beginning to give off smoke,
You drew a sigh from the land of Saʿwān and made its armpit blossom with odor,
You broke what had been steel, scattering filigreed silver beads and necklaces,
You never tire, O creation of Umm Qālid, al-Jirāf has not yet judged between us."

Al-Jirāf stood up and left aside al-Khazāʾin[89] and said: "Biʾr al-ʿAzab has advantages:
It has a mine of fresh air—there is not another like it in the world,

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[87] An important demon, usually invoked in anger.

[88] Z: A small mammal proverbial for its laziness and clumsy movement. The verb "*dabdaba*/*yidabdib*" derives from this.

[89] This is probably Khazāʾin Muṭahhar, north of Ṣanʿāʾ. P, 127; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 31n4.

> Its gardens are filled with song and excellent vines and the birds in the boughs make love poems.
> The clouds stand to greet them—its *ḥadīth* of beauty has become part of the *Musnad*…"[90]

Another poem of al-Khafanjī's purports to describe the raucous goings-on at a women's *qāt*-chew (*tafruṭah*).[91] The story begins when the poet asks the narrator to tell him what happened at the "Women's Party of the Basīs Clan" (*Ṭafrutah* of bayt al-basīs): "He responded and said: 'Last night my neighbors related: something happened while we were sitting at noon that appalled us.'" This preface seems to parody the *ḥadīth*'s *isnād*:

> The young man said: "Tell me what happened between the girls,
> Both them and mature women who had given birth, people with errant minds,"
> [The narrator] answered and said: "My neighbors told me yesterday evening,
> That something happened while they were sitting, around noon, which shocked them,
> This is the story of [what happened] on Thursday at the women's party at *bayt al-basīs* on account of the *lasīs*[92] which all of the guests attacked,
>
> They all jumped at once as soon as the pot was set down,
> When one sluggish girl (*dubdubī*) came and knocked over the bundle of rue,[93] all of the matrons screamed,

[90] The expressions "you reproached me" (*qadish fidā tishtay*) and "what a piece of work you are" (*ḥalā wa-khaṭfih*) are only used by the women of Ṣanʿāʾ. Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 28n5, 29n3.

[91] Al-Maqalih, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 232–240. Al-Ḥibshī says that a house in Ṣanʿāʾ is called "al-Basīs" in his *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-jīl al-jadīd, 1987), 221n2. Lucine Taminian says that this poem, "*Tafruṭah bayt al-basis*" is commonly invoked by Yemeni men today to describe such occasions. "Playing With Words," 3–4.

[92] A: a delicious savory dish prepared for guests at a celebration in honor of a new mother (a "*shikmah*"). It would be prepared by the woman's mother, relatives or friends, and would be served in a large dish to the guests. (Nowadays it would probably be brought out on plates.) Al-Ḥibshī, *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 221n4: this dish is made of lentils and other grains; P, 448; a word used for different types of food; I, 802.

[93] A: This term is used to refer to *shadhdhāb*, an aromatic plant that accompanies the traditional decoration of the sitting room for the *shikmah* and is used in other happy occasions. (It wards off *shayāṭīn*).

[One of them] caught it [before it fell over] and said "Watch out! It almost struck the soft spot on the head of the little hoopoe[94] (the baby) next to me,"
[S]he said: "He nearly fell on account of this crowd of sluts,"[95]

The girl said: "Shut up Grandmother!—such [speech] is not appropriate for [celebrating] childbirth,
You ruined my headdress[96]—on that we are all agreed,

Listen you guests, what kind of people are you? Are you never satisfied?
Your bellies will explode! Why did you come here, O gluttons?"

The old woman said: "How now, my brother's boastful daughter,
How much more of this haughtiness are you thinking up, you hussies?

You (s.) have become degraded, my kinswoman, [full of] empty, useless talk,
What is the point in boasting all of the time, you bitches?"

The girl said: "Listen! Though I may wear womens' slippers,
Neither you, shameful woman that you are, nor those idle loafers may strike anyone,

Why are you (pl.) and this she-devil ruining the *ṭafrutah*? Blech! What a stink of dirty diapers! Has this become a *ṭafrutah* for wetnurses?"[97]

The old woman stood up to her, her leg swelling up, "Who will stand up and bash her head in?—Those [girls] are truly shameless."

"There is no doubt that there is little life [left in them]—but perhaps you have some *khūliyā*,[98]
They want to slurp *mīmiyā*[99] loudly."

The old woman said: "One with hardly any brains is pretty and contented, these have no love for ugliness,
They all help each other [in their ugly deeds].

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[94] Reading "*al-yabyabī*" with AR, 58, al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 233n5 and al-Ḥibshī, *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 221, instead of *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*'s nonsensical and redundant "*dubdubī*."

[95] *Nābirah*/*nābirāt*—A: derogatory term only used by women to describe a young woman in a hurry to get married. P, 476–477: unmarried girls, or woman who follows man against advice of parents, disgraceful and insolent woman.

[96] *ʿUṣbah*—A: an elaborate headdress decorated with scarves, flowers, and silver jewelry worn by the new mother.

[97] A: Here the speaker not only attacks the women for the bad smells but reminds them that it is improper for babies to be brought to a proper *ṭafrutah*.

[98] P, 140: *succus lycii*, medicinal plant for the eyes or for melancholy.

[99] Bitumen—Armin Schopen, *Traditionelle Heilmittel in Jemen* (Weisbaden: Steiner, 1983), 36; al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 234n6: a mineral used to make a drink for madmen.

Go easy now, go easy, don't fart on a bad day,[100]
If you control yourself, your lot will be good—do not rejoice in piddling things."

[A young woman named] Ward al-Khudūd answered: "O people, I have neither good fortune nor a [generous] neighbor [wearing] silver beads—stop swooning, girls.

Why is this madness growing, even if it were to be smothered with a head scarf? She might die over there under the ceremonial decorations?[101]
Push her over [to the side] you loafers!"

The old woman said: "Cease this stubbornness for my childrens' sake,
Should my daughter see and hear this shocking speech?

O Father, better your lot for you have done wrong,
Do not afflict your households with gossip, you rabble,

Do the old receive any respect from the young any longer? Does a chief among women still get some respect? Tell me, O quarrelers!"

The playful gazelle[102] said: "By God let her stay away,
Stop all of [her] miserable calamities, the old women are tiring us out.

We are guests who have come for the *lasīs*, do not try to entrap us,
'Hoe and basket and plow'[103]—you came with arrogant attitudes."

The old woman said: "Enough! Away with you—you deserve to be slapped with the old slapping shoe,[104]
Will the rest of you gossipers speak to me this manner?

God's [beneficence] be upon you,[105] don't get angry on my account and retreat to your husband's house while you are still burning [with anger],
Bless the Prophet[106]—don't yell, If you are so upset, go down to the well,"[107]

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[100] This *bayt* only appears in the Vatican version. A: These are each expressions that basically mean "do not make a spectacle of yourself."

[101] *Sijāf*—A: A set of decorations for the *shikmah*. The new mother is seated on a raised platform and prayer mats are hung on the walls behind her and the shelves overhead contain various items; P, 216: carpets.

[102] "*Khishf*"—a diglossic pun. A: "*khushf*" means a dull-witted girl in the Ṣanʿānī dialect.

[103] This seems like a proverb. Unfortunately, it is not discussed by *qāḍī* Ismāʿīl al-Akwaʿ in his *al-Amthāl al-yamāniyah* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-Jīl al-jadīd, 1984).

[104] *Al-khilfaʿah*—P, 136. A: a shoe retired from use as footwear whose only use was slapping, generally kept by a Ṣanʿānī mother for disciplining children. It had to be old and expendable in case she threw it and missed and it got lost.

[105] [*Khayrat*] *allāh ʿalayk*—an expression said in anger. A: it means "Don't go."

[106] "*Ṣalī ʿalayh*" A: "Calm down."

[107] "*Al-bīr idhā antayn ghāriqāt*" A: "*ghāriq*" means angry in Ṣanʿānī Arabic.

> The girl said: "Be patient, wearer of the *qinā*,ʿ[108]
> Don't catch cold [by leaving the warm room]. Deliver a message for me, saying: '[those] are perfect women, you crones,'"
>
> 'You, you, (O Tender One!), how have brains become so light?
> 'Watch over me, O lord!'[109] You will continue mocking people.'"
>
> The old woman died with laughter from this wonderful speech—she would have pissed herself if those present would not have complained.

Here, a quarrel has erupted between the generations because a number of things have fallen over in the women's rush to get the *lasīs*. In this case, *lasīs* refers to the dishes served at the ceremony for a new mother (*shikmah*). Muṭahhar al-Iryānī notes that the *lasīs* served at the new year contained all manner of grains and eating it was believed to confer a blessing.[110] Thus, these women seem extremely inhospitable because of their gluttony and zeal for popular religion. The *ṭafrutah* ceremony proceeds to the dancing portion but this too goes foul, leading to a brawl:

> [The old woman] turned around, wounded, and said, "Qadariyah, you beauty, finish up your story—I deserve girls' jokes,"
>
> Then (an old woman) crouched down here because of the cunning of the bastard girl and began to sing in the midst of the singers and three "leveled" [dancers] stood up,[111]
>
> She stood and the girl picked up a stone in the blink of an eye, then pierced the drum [with it] and all of the dancers sat down,
>
> The tumultuous party began anew and everyone got up and struck each other,[112]
> Some were scratching each other, and four of them were biting,

[108] "Veil" in classical Arabic. A: Here the word probably refers to an ornamental headscarf, usually red or green, worn by a new mother or a bride.

[109] "*Amān amānek yā sharīf*"—al-Ḥibshī writes that the "lord" "is the vulture that eats the corpse and this is a customary proverb for a person who is nearing death." *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 224n11; Z confirms the accuracy of al-Ḥibshī's interpretation.

[110] I, 802.

[111] "*Qāmayn thalāth mitdārijāt*." A: Ṣanʿānī dances are best performed with two or three dancers and often involve dancers standing (or kneeling) simultaneously, an effect that might be described as "leveled."

[112] Reading "*bi-tiṣāfiʿīn*" rather than al-Maqāliḥ's "*bi-tiṣāfiḥīn*"

The girl grasped the old woman by the wall, wringing her out like a piece of wet laundry,[113]
"Help!" she cried. "This is not permissible—the young are still stronger [than the old]!

Can you grab a woman, choking her until her face is contorted and her veins puff out like clotheslines?"

They struggled with hair and head, the girl not noticing anything until her pants ripped. Still they continued to grapple.

She plucked off old shoes, and tripped over the coffee table,
The four cups on it shook on account of the mighty ladies…

Finally, the new mother issues a call for peace.

She said to them: "Be done with this, Āminah—even our coffee cups are not safe,
Let there be peace in my house. There is nothing here for impious people."

She [the new mother] turned around and said, screaming: "Do something with my son Ṣalāḥ! Don't tread on him,
He was already ill in his father's house, as his sagging shoulders [show].

Why all of this rudeness? You should show some self-respect,[114]
All of your coughing [is unwanted], Don't come back because your faces have changed.

O Muḥṣinah,[115] why aren't you ashamed? I know you don't have anything better to do,
You came here to laugh and joke, pretending that you were going to a *tafruṭah*.

What, O stupid people, by the father of Ḥusayn[116] you do not have good lineages. What do you say Qabūl?[117] Aren't they base commoners?

Aren't you ashamed when people pass by and see you clearly, right arm drooping?
Those sluts have never done anything good for me,

[113] "*Wa-lazzat al-bint al-ʿajūz fī l-jadr mazzathā mazūz*." This could also mean "squeezing her like a juicy piece of fruit" (or "like squeezing the juice from a prune").
[114] Reading "*jilāfah*" with AR and "*kun mayyizīn anfāsikin*" with *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*.
[115] A: Stereotypical woman's name.
[116] Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.
[117] A: a woman's name.

By God, O legitimate girl, if men were here today, given what has gone on, you would have slept soundly.[118]

However, God is merciful. My husband went to his friend's house and I had no friend around to come and drive off the mischief-makers,

The woman who had just given birth sought protection and if not for the bridesmaid,[119]
I would have brought a man to arbitrate and rid the house of these awful women.

Āminah cannot be helped, for she is a reprobate on account of her ignorance,
Her family complains about her, but [the women] say that we are entertaining,
Their faces are full[120] and their sleeves drag on the ground,

Discover their state for yourself—[you will learn] their love for bullying,[121]
On the day they stain themselves with henna they will not forget, when they come and swell up with pride,

Jumping up and down on the floor with the rage of animals let loose from their yokes."
She said to her, "Be patient and do not worry,
I attest to your innocence—these horrible women just keep coming,

Don't bother [us]. No one is home. We will close our door and thank God for saving us and conferring blessings on us."

"My speech in *qaṣīd* has come to an end and it is from the new poetry, with bundle of wildflowers[122] crowning its head and overlooking pleasant cheeks."

Poets other than al-Khafanjī made similar experiments with dialects and foreign languages, albeit with less success. Some poems used various African languages. The *dīwān* of Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf, for example, records a poem by al-Muḥsin b. al-Mahdī written "in the tongue of the Ethiopians" (*ʿalāʾ lughat al-ḥabūsh*):[123]

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[118] "*La-kān timissayn shābiʿāt.*" A: idiomatic, meaning "you would have received a beating and then gone home to sleep in your husband's house."

[119] P, 252: bride's hairdresser and decorator, sometimes also sings; A: a woman from the *muzayyin* class.

[120] Z: Equivalent in meaning to the English "they are full of themselves."

[121] Reading "*zabzabāt*" with *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*. AR's "*zāriyāt*" (vulgar women) makes sense as well.

[122] "*Zanṭ ʿabīd*" must be Gomphrena globosa (*zanṭ ḥabashī*). P, 206.

[123] Al-Jaḥḥāf, *Dīwān*, 103v.

> The Ethiopian gazelle does not understand my words or [their] meanings,…
> But do not chastise her when [she] dances shakily (*tinnāsh*), she has nothing to do other than dye [her fingers] (*tikhḍār*) and put on makeup (*tinqāsh*),
> And perfume herself (*tirshāsh*) [by burning] aromatic wood and applying rosewater—one who is still young has neither responsibility nor opinion.

Oddly, the only "Ethiopian" aspect of this poem seems to be the type of dancing described. A poem quoted in a history of the Tihāmah also uses words from an African language. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī comments that such bilingual poems were common in the Tihāmah.[124] A poem addressed to a ruler, written in the nineteenth century by ʿAlī Muḥammad Ẓāfir, contains the following stanza: (The italicized words are written in an African language, which Ẓāfir learned after having lived there for a time.)

> My lord, there is never any "*food*" in this house nor is there any"*money*" with which I can buy humble greens,
> The boys said to me "go and get us some sweet dates" and I said, "*I am penniless*,"
> They said: "Sell a *donkey*" and I said, "I would but you would be sorry if I sold the donkey."[125]

Some poets used Turkish words. For example, one poem in al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā Luqmān is composed "*ʿalā lughat al-turk*."[126] This poem, whose language is a mixture of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, purports to be Turkish, and the refrain is, "This Turkish poetry is unpleasant." (*lā taʿjib min naẓm hādhā l-turkī*). A twentieth-century poem by ʿAbdallah Aḥmad ʿĀmir describes a soldier in Imām Yaḥyā's army using a plethora of Turkish words for the soldier's gear.[127]

But these were not the only foreign languages that populated these poems. The redactor of al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* describes the following *muwashshaḥ* as having been composed "in the language of Bakīl" (*ʿalā lughat bakīl*).

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[124] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 209–210.
[125] Ibid., 209–210.
[126] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 26v.
[127] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 75, 176–177.

Ibn Shaʿlān[128] said: "Bring the bellows—I will stoke the fire until evening,
O you who are generous with the dry oven-wiping cloth [the atmosphere contains] the smell of morning winds from Shaʿūb,[129]
If the cauldron gets hot, bring the potholders, and bring the spoon to your mouth when chewing,
Wash the stirrer and the serving spoon and feed the delicate playful fawn.

Add a bit of flour to thicken it and grind some *ḥawāʾij*,[130]
The sky is full of clouds,
I have a hankering for country bread.

The pot is not for the guests—it makes them rough when they chew [such food],[131]
The best meat has no grease on it [nor does] any other dish, except for *ḥanīdh*.[132]
If you eat meat, grab the sheep's waist, and if you like drink, have a drop of wine,
How wonderful is the bowl's burbling, and [how wonderful is] the perfume and aroma of barbequed meat,
You should [have] grease, so leave aside the wine glass and stop perfuming [yourself] with good-smelling things.

Take the best spice mixture,
Don't waste time with gristle,
or chickens or hens.

Leave the choice lambs to the libertines—the meat of a castrated [animal] befits you, playful one…."

The chief indicator that the poem attempts to portray a "foreign" dialect is the poem's recurring use of the "*alif-mim*" definite article. A parody of a wine poem, this poem captures the libertine spirit of the *khamriyyah* ("if you eat meat, grab the sheep's waist," "leave the choice lambs to the libertines"), but replaces wine with meat.[133] The poem might accurately

[128] AR has "bin khawlān." Khawlān is a major subgroup of the Bakīl tribal confederation.

[129] Neighborhood in Ṣanʿāʾ. The north gate to the (old) city is Bāb al-Shaʿūb.

[130] A mixture of spices.

[131] The second hemistich of this line is difficult: "*wa am-dast mā hū li-ahl am-ḍuyūfah / fa-hū muqassi khawāṣṣih bi-maqlūb*". Z suggests that this may be a pun having to do with constipation.

[132] A baked lamb dish.

[133] Julie Scott Meisami argues that the wine poem itself parodies *ghazal*. "Abu Nuwas and the Rhetoric of Parody," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner Zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs and Gregor Schoeler (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 2:250–251, 254, 257.

be termed a "*laḥmiyyah*," for the poem foregrounds words that describe one of the primary topics in al-Khafanjī's poetry: food.

Because in Yemen, discussions about household topics contain the greatest percentage of dialect, one should not dismiss al-Khafanjī's concentration on food as puerile humor. By using food as a major building block for poetry (he frequently likens composition to cookery), al-Khafanjī and his compatriots defamiliarize the argot of the *sūq* and transform it into a literary language.

Conclusions

The shift undertaken by al-Khafanjī and his companions constitutes one of the greatest experiments in Arabic poetic language. Rather than looking for vernacular approximations for the classical lexicon of courtly *ghazal*, these poets avoid classical Arabic to the greatest extent possible. Rather than obscuring the conflicting interests behind occupational, ethnic, and generic dialects by retreating into the bosom of a unified canon of classical Arabic literature, their poems draw attention to a kaleidoscopic and contested linguistic field. Whereas Bakhtin's characterization of the background to Greek parody as a "confident and uncontested monoglossia" applies to Arabic literature, his description of Pushkin's work as a "living mix of varied and opposing voices" aptly describes the work of the Safīnah circle.[134]

However, there is at least one difference between the heteroglossic literature that Bakhtin studied and the poems of the Safīnah circle. In Bakhtin's account of the emergence of macaronic parodies from medieval Latin, this new literature contributed to the disintegration of the old order and laid some of the intellectual groundwork for the Renaissance and new modes of thought.[135] The members of the Safīnah circle, on the other hand, belonged to the highest orders of society, the *sādah* and the *quḍāh*, and most likely looked down on those with lesser social status. Therefore, rather than serving as a democratizing force, experiments in vernacular literature might have merely drawn attention to *ḥumaynī* poetry's elitism. In this vein, Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf writes, "I am

[134] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 49, 67.
[135] Ibid., 71.

not a jurist nor a governor, nor am I a stable-keeper or a muleteer" (*wa-lā anā qāḍī wa-lā wālī / wa-lā min ahl al-khayl wa l-bighāl*). That is to say, I am a *sayyid*, descended from the Prophet.

In this light, a Gramscian interpretation of the poetry of the Safīnah circle as an elitist attempt to expropriate popular culture in order to extend control over the people might certainly seem plausible. Gramsci writes:

> Every time the question of language surfaces, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony.[136]

The stark polarities of popular and elite that Gramsci and Bakhtin favor possess clear parallels in the diglossic material in question.

Nevertheless, the question can also be profitably answered with greater attention to the ambiguities. In his study of dialect literature in the American Gilded Age, Gavin Jones offers a corrective to the theories of Gramsci and Bakhtin. He notes that "attempts at linguistic dominance were themselves fraught with complex anxieties," and that these anxieties expressed themselves in a "peculiar double movement within much dialect writing."[137] On the one hand, dialect literature sought to include disparate regional voices and offer an affirmative vision of a united post-Civil War American nation. On the other hand, Jones points to the "sense in which dialect frustrated the ideology of national unity by demonstrating the growing distances and differences within English itself."[138] "Dialect writing," he observes,

> could also register an anxious, constantly collapsing attempt to control the fragmentation and change that characterize any national tongue. And dialect could encode the possibility of resistance, not just by undermining the integrity of a dominant standard, but by recording the subversive voices in which alternative versions of reality were engendered.[139]

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[136] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 183–184.

[137] Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 50.

[138] Ibid., 39.

[139] Ibid., 11.

In their macaronic corpus, the poets of the Safīnah circle created a sophisticated poetic diction where images like beans, gravy, and feces displace the crystalline imagery of traditional love poetry. In writing and exchanging such poetry, these poets cast a sardonic eye on the linguistic melange of their society and affirmed their elite status to each other. At the same time, their new poetic language calls into question *ḥumaynī ghazal* and the unity of classical Arabic poetics.

The following poem best explains the ramifications of the Safīnah circle's experimental poetics:

> Return, indulgent heart, return—Go back to the art of dissolution once again,
> O generous ones, what is the benefit of remembering facts? Have you forgotten nights past?
> Your Friday prostrations are useless (*zawād*), don't take lessons from the vanished past,
> You are praying over a remnant of ash—religion's value has become obsolete,
> Leave aside your inkstand, your gum arabic, and ink, there is no use in jibber-jabber,
> You cast down your head among the heads of the slaves, and your learning appears to me to be a desert,[140]
> Your memorized texts (*qirāyatak*) are its fundament, like a region—Its subdivisions are the *Lumaʿ*[141] and its marginal notes,
> For the price of the *Sharḥ*[142] you could get a carpet and for the *Khubayṣī*[143] a slave girl,
> The *Shāṭibiyyah*[144] would get you a sack of locusts, [you might receive] a handful of leeks for the *Shāfiyah*,[145]
> The *Tadhkirah*[146] will get you some cress and the *Kāfiyah*[147] a [bunch] of cilantro,
> A *Nahj al-balāghah* is worth a scanty supper, with marginal notes a wholesome meal,

[140] Reading with *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*: "*wa-lā budd ilayy bi-ʿilmek bādiyah*" rather than Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, "*wa-mā badā lak bi-ʿilmek bādiyah*."
[141] *Fiqh* work by ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Yaḥyā (d. 1272). Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 74n1.
[142] Ibid., 74n2: *Sharḥ al-azhār* by al-Mahdī Aḥmad Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā.
[143] Ibid., 74n2: A commentary on the *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq* by al-Khubayṣī.
[144] Ibid., 74n3: al-Shāṭibī's *urjūzah* on *aḥkām*.
[145] Ibid., 74n3: Ibn al-Ḥijāb's work on syntax.
[146] Ibid., 74n4: *Tadhkirat al-ʿAnsī* (d. 1388/1389).
[147] Ibid., 74n4: Ibn al-Ḥijāb's work on grammar.

> What is the use of black [ink] and white [paper]? The *Nāẓirī*[148] can be a pledge for a little hill,
> With the *Shifāʾ*[149] you can buy on a bad day for the market or get two measures of land in al-Ṣāfiyah,[150]
> You hang on to learning as ticks do, always conscientious and very zealous,
> [But you] did not get what [you wanted], leave the branches of learning to pure minds […][151]

This poem parodies what ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī labeled "teaching poetry" (*al-shiʿr al-taʿlīmī*), a genre of poetry that was a popular topic of poetic correspondence between men of learning.[152] These poems, which could be found in contemporary biographical dictionaries, often took the form of versified *curriculum vitae* that listed—with no small self-satisfaction—the titles of books a scholar had mastered or versified bibliographies to be presented to students.

Taminian draws attention to this poem's social subversiveness. By equating a learned man's library with groceries, the poem calls into question the value of a life lived in the pursuit of knowledge.[153] Viewed from a semantic perspective, the poem invests such images as a leather bag of locusts or a bunch of cilantro with near sacrality. In other words, the man's books are not worthless because the goods they could be traded in for could provide him with the fulfillment he futilely sought

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[148] According to Bernard Haykel, "al-Nāẓirī" most likely refers to Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nāẓirī's (fl. sixteenth century) *Jawharat al-farāʾiḍ li-maʿānī miftāḥ al-fāʾiḍ*, the most widely studied work on inheritance law among the later Zaydis. See al-Wajih, *Aʿlam al-muʾallifīn*, 851.

[149] Haykel says that this could refer to one of the following three works: Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Ṣalāḥ al-Ṭabarī's *al-Shifāʾ ghalīl al-sāʾil ʿammā taḥmaluhu al-kāfil* on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, al-Qāḍī ʿAbdallah b. Muḥammad al-Najrī's *al-Shifāʾ al-ʿalīl* (on *fiqh* of the law-related Qurʾānic verses, or al-Amīr al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn's *al-Shifāʾ al-uwām fī aḥādīth al-aḥkām* (*fiqh* based on *ḥadīth*).

[150] A village outside Ṣanʿāʾ.

[151] Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 73–75. The poem is discussed in Taminian, "Playing with words," 136.

[152] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 151–152. The example al-Ḥibshī provides, by ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Amīr (d. 1804/1805), is more sophisticated than the types of poems I have described in that it disguises the titles of the books.

[153] This statement should be qualified. Many similarly irreligious poems can be found in the corpus of premodern Arabic poetry. It seems that scholarship on this material, whether it is Goldziher and von Grunebaum interpreting it as "secular," or Taminian interpreting it as revolutionary, fails to take into account the extent to which this particular religious and traditional society was willing to laugh at its own expense in certain circumstances.

in their pages. For the libertine, equivalents to academic promotion are gastronomic, sexual, or scatalogical.

These poets built their world from the cacophonous speech of a carnivalesque parade of people: tribal mercenaries, butchers, tenant farmers, elderly women, and Jews. The inclusion of this last group, which held a precarious position in Yemeni sociey, is significant because Jews did not register as individuals in the purview of such learned Muslim literary activities as *tarājim* works. Whether or not Jews would have wanted to live there, the poetic world of the Safīnah circle was a place where social relationships rested on a new basis. Here, the religion of libertinism replaced Islam as the prestige ideology and thus allowed, within its limited scope, a glimmer of a cacophonous, contested, and ultimately humanistic vision.

PART TWO

Ḥumaynī POETRY IN THE YEMENI CULTURAL AND LITERARY LANDSCAPE

CHAPTER THREE

A GOLDEN AGE OF *ḤUMAYNĪ* POETRY

Formal Poetic Patronage

From the mid-seventeenth century, when the reign of the Qāsimī Imāms began, through the nineteenth century, most poets wrote at least some *ḥumaynī* poetry to complement their classical repertoires. Others devoted entire *dīwān*s to this poetry. Of the over one hundred professional and non-professional Yemeni poets who lived between Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 1607/1608) and Muḥsin b. ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Isḥāq (d. 1849/1850), there were ten poets who wrote *ḥumaynī dīwān*s, eleven poets whose *dīwān*s included *ḥumaynī* poetry, twenty poets whose *ḥumaynī* verse is preserved in *safāyin*, and seventeen poets whom Yemeni historians describe as having written *ḥumaynī* poetry but whose contributions to the genre do not survive.[1] Some or most of the remaining poets probably wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry as well. Since this period produced a great deal more *ḥumaynī* poetry than any other period in Yemeni history, it can be considered the genre's Golden Age.

During this time, the ability to compose *ḥumaynī* poetry was a common credential for a Yemeni poet to possess. Therefore, the dramatic rise in the popularity of *ḥumaynī* poetry was the result of a rise in the fortunes of poetry as a whole. The main factor behind this change was the Qāsimī Imāms', their governors', and Zaydī nobles' (*sādah*) patronage of poetry. *Ḥumaynī* poetry also assumed a prominent role in other activities in Yemen: namely, semi-formal gatherings in the home to chew *qāt* or drink coffee and engage in witty conversation, and elaborate wedding ceremonies. Yemenis insist that their wedding rituals, in

[1] ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, the preeminent scholar of Yemeni literature, counted a total of forty-five poetic *dīwān*s (classical and *ḥumaynī*) from 1668 to the late nineteenth century. Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 260–262. Al-Ḥibshī's list includes works that are not extant but are mentioned in biographical dictionaries.

which *ḥumaynī* poetry plays a prominent role, unfold according to a centuries-old model.[2]

A rich tradition of poetry by and about the Zaydī Imāms began with the Imām al-Hādī ilāʾ l-ḥaqq Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn's establishment of a Zaydī state in Yemen in 897 C.E. Such poems can generally be found in the official biographies (*sīrah*s) of the Imāms and in the *dīwān*s of those poets who wrote panegyrics about them. Both panegyrics and poems of self-praise characterized the Imāms in a way that underscored the Zaydī concept of *Imāmah*. They often described the Imām as a just and courageous descendant of the Prophet, who was capable of delivering sound legal opinions (a *mujtahid*). On occasion, they described him as one who knew esoteric matters (*al-ghayb*).[3] Poets ascribed such qualities to the Zaydī Imāms throughout this period. The Imām's ʿAlid descent and courage dictated the subjects that Zaydī panegyrists mined in the Arabic poetic tradition. Recounting the Imām's lineage tapped into traditions of Shīʿī veneration of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his son, the martyr al-Ḥusayn.[4] Poems about battles drew upon the Mutanabbian tradition of war poetry.

From the seventeenth century on, Yemeni writers began to assemble an enormous number of poems, a fact that can be partially explained with reference to the changing nature of the Imāmate. Learning was a prerequisite for the Imām and poetry was considered an important

[2] The earliest description of a Yemeni wedding of which I am aware comes from al-Wāsiʿī's 1928 *Taʾrīkh al-yaman: al-Musammā furjat al-humūm wa l-ḥuzn fī ḥawādith wa-taʾrīkh al-yaman*.

[3] The fourteen qualifications for the Imāmate (*al-ashriṭah al-arbaʿat ʿashr*) are given, following Ibn al-Murtaḍā's *Sharḥ al-azhār* in Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 77. References to Imāms' esoteric knowledge (*al-ghayb*) by Zaydī poets seem to have vexed Shawqī Ḍayf, who lamented such examples of "extremism" (*ghuluww*) among Zaydis. Ḍayf, *Taʾrīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī 5: ʿAṣr al-duwal wa l-imārāt—al-jazīrah al-ʿarabiyyah, al-ʿiraq, īrān* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1980), 165, 171. Esoteric knowledge is a theme that Yemeni poets seem to have imported from the wider Shīʿī corpus of laments on the ʿAlids. As documented by P. Smoor, the poets of the Fāṭimid court made the most of such themes. P. Smoor, "The Master of the Century": Fāṭimid Poets in Cairo," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1995), 139–162. Muḥammad Sayyid al-Kīlānī made the important point that Sunni poets wrote a great deal of *madīḥ* on the *ahl al-bayt*, some of which included ostensibly "extreme Shīʿī" motifs. Kīlānī, *Athar al-tashayyuʿ fī l-adab al-ʿarabī* (Cairo: Lajnat al-nashr li l-jāmiʿīn, 1947), 85, 89–90.

[4] Wilfred Madelung, "The *Hāshimiyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shiʿism," in *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 5–26.

branch of learning. We find an Imām[5] and a claimant to the Imāmate[6] among the poets of the Qāsimī period. But the Imām for whom poetry was most important, al-Mahdī "Ṣāḥib al-Mawāhib," was, according to contemporaries and the formidable stable of professional poets he employed, not only a fine poet, but also an excellent arbiter of poetry.

Some poets' careers spanned the reigns of several Imāms. Perhaps the most outstanding personage in this regard was ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl (d. 1722/1723), who wrote a corpus of panegyric poetry while in the employ of the Imāms al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl b. al-Qāsim (reigned 1644–1676), al-Mahdī Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan (r. 1676–1681), al-Muʾayyad Muḥammad b. al-Mutawakkil (r. 1681–1686), al-Mahdī Muḥammad (Ṣāḥib al-Mawāhib) (r. 1687–1718), al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim b. al-Muʾayyad (r. 1716–1720), and al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 1716–1727).[7] It was more common, however, for poets to seek out several patrons. The Imāms, their viziers, provincial governors, the nobles of Kawkabān, and the Zaydī emirs of Mecca were all willing to pay for panegyric poetry. Among the Imāms, certain names occur frequently as the employers of poets.[8]

During this period, the line between poet and civil servant was a porous one, as some poets served administrative functions. Al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl b. al-Qāsim, for example, hired three professional panegyrists

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[5] The Imām al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Muḥammad, Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (Ṣāhib al-Mawāhib's brother) (d. 1753/1754). Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:9–29.

[6] Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Qādir b. al-Nāṣir b. ʿAbd al-Rabb b. ʿAlī al-Kawkabānī (d. 1700/1701).

[7] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:198–199.

[8] These are: 1) al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl b. al-Qāsim (d. 1676), who employed ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl, Ibrāhīm al-Hindī, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad (d. 1738/1739). (Three poets in all.) 2) al-Mahdī Muḥammad (Ṣāḥib al-Mawāhib) (d. 1718), who employed Ibn Abī l-Rijāl, Ibrāhīm al-Hindī, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Wādī (d. 1669/1670), Ḥaydar Āghā b. Muḥammad al-Rūmī, Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Yāfiʿī (d. 1698/1699), Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥamzī (d. 1700/1701), Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Mirhabi (d. 1701/1702), Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Ānisī ("al-Zanamah") (d. 1703/1704 or 1707/1708), ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī (d. 1726/1727), ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlī al-Wazīr (d. 1734/1735), and Zayd b. ʿAlī al-Khaywānī (d. 1737/1738). (Eleven poets in all.) 3) al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 1716–1727), who employed Ibn Abī l-Rijāl, Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ (d. 1188/1774), ʿAbdallah al-Wazīr, and Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā "al-Khayyāṭ" (d. 1727/1728). (Four poets in all.) 4) his son al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (d. 1748)—Ismāʿīl al-Fāyiʿ, and ʿAbdallah al-Wazīr. (Two poets in all.) 5) al-Mahdi al-ʿAbbas (1748–1775)—Ismāʿīl al-Fāyiʿ (d. 1774/1775), his brother Muḥsin b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ (d. 1780/1781), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qāṭin (d. 1784/1785), ʿAbdallah b. al-Ḥusayn al-Shāmī, and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Zuhayrī (d. 1799/1800). (5 poets)

to make a strong statement of self-confidence, power, and dignity. The *dīwān*s of ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl and Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ contain many examples of poems "chronicling" (*muʾarrikhan*) the Imām's various building projects and state occasions.

Al-Mutawakkil's brother's grandson, al-Mahdī, apparently thought this a successful strategy. In addition to the two poets of his great-uncle's that he kept in his employ (al-Hindī and Ibn Abī l-Rijal), he hired nine more poets. Given this Imām's reliance on mercenaries to solve his political-military dilemmas, what must have been lavish expenditures on panegyric would not have been out of character. More importantly, the Imām al-Mahdī's legitimacy was suspect. Many doubted his learning, a prerequisite for the Imāmate. By surrounding himself with poets, he may have aimed to do three things: he could drown out his opponents' voices through a campaign of panegyric propaganda; his poetic coterie would call to mind the glorious reign of his great-uncle; and, finally, he could show himself to be learned in the art of poetry.

This interpretation is bolstered by a report on a sermon delivered by a certain Hibatallāh to rid himself of the suspicion of having reviled the Imām al-Mahdī. He says:

> There are those who belittle the rank of poetry but men, without poetry, are nothing but beasts.[9] Our Imām, al-Mahdī li-Dīn Allāh (may God preserve and protect him) is one of those who knows eloquence. He has become well known for his generosity and liberality and [should be counted] among those who recited poetry, sanctioned it, heard it, and were delighted by it. The poets arose to recite in his presence and he knew that man held [poetry] in contempt (text corrupt). You are one of those who grew up in literature and became old with it and crawled after and strove steadily towards it.[10]

Hibatallāh's sermon, probably composed under duress, points to the considerable dangers of working for rulers: poets in their entourages were frequent targets of their ire. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan fled to Mecca from the wrath of his patron, the Imām al-Mutawakkil b.

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[9] In a panegyric on ʿAlī b. al-Mutawakkil, Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Mirhabī wrote: "*wa-fī l-nāsi man yastaṣghiru l-shiʿra rutbatan / wa-mā l-nāsu law lā al-shiʿru illā bahāʾimu*." Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 3:48.

[10] ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl, *Dīwān* (MS Western Mosque Library *adab* 24), 21r–22r.

al-Manṣūr. There, under the sponsorship of the emir Zayd b. Muḥsin, he inveighed against his former employer.[11]

As a patron, the Imām al-Mahdī was particularly dangerous. R.B. Serjeant writes:

> Ṣāḥib al-Mawāhib seems to have executed, looted, bestowed or withheld gifts in so arbitrary a fashion that it was popularly said a *mārid* [a rebellious spirit] of the Jinn would speak to him by night to kill someone on the following day.[12]

This Imām wanted to kill the writer Yūsuf b. ʿAlī al-Kawkabānī (d. 1704/1705), but a slave girl intervened on his behalf, arguing that he would become unpopular by killing *ʿulamāʾ*.[13]

Indeed, becoming embroiled in the politics of the court could be hazardous. Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥūthī (d. 1808/1809) drily remarks that "some of the poets spoke about what did not concern them" (*takallama baʿḍu l-shuʿarāʾi fīmā lā yaʿnīhim*) during the succession struggle that followed the death of the Imām al-Muʾayyad Muḥammad b. al-Mutawakkil in 1686. Since Ibrāhīm al-Hindī, the poet hired by the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad's great-uncle, was alleged to have been among the plotters, he fled the court to live out the rest of his life as an ascetic.[14] When the Imām thought that another retainer from his great-uncle's day, ʿAlī b. Ṣaliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl, had insulted him, he ordered the man's house destroyed.[15]

Imām al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās imprisoned the *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qāṭin for two years.[16] During this time, the mystically inclined jurist is said to have unraveled one of the Sufi mysteries.[17] The calumnies uttered against this Imām by a mentally ill poet named Ismāʿīl b. al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Rijāl (d. 1776/1777) led to the man's restriction in a limited area of the city of Ṣanʿāʾ, where he was gagged.[18] This served the dual purpose

[11] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasānī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:299.
[12] Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 82n122.
[13] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:408.
[14] Ibid., 1:30–31.
[15] Ibid., 2:199.
[16] Ibid., 1:277.
[17] Ibid., 1:280. Zabārah does not say what this mystery was but he read about the incident in al-Qāṭin's "*al-Tuḥfah*." He likely means al-Qāṭin's *Tuḥfat al-ikhwān bi-sanad sayyid walad ʿadnān*, a copy of which is extant in Ṣanʿāʾ. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid, *Sources de l'histoire du Yémen à l'époque Musulmane* (Cairo: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1974), 278–279.
[18] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:349.

of defending the man's tongue from the depredations of the *jinn* and protecting the Imām's good name. The poet Ismāʿīl b. Ḥusayn Jaʿmān (d. 1840/1841) was ambushed and killed by Ismaʿīlīs in Wādī Ḍahr along with his master, the Imām al-Nāṣir ʿAbdallah b. al-Ḥasan.[19]

Most of the eighteenth-century Imāms who followed the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad, notably al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn (1716–1727), his son al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (1727–1748), and al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās (1748–1775), continued a vigorous patronage of poetry. The only exceptions were the Imāms of Ṣaʿdah and Shahārah, al-Muʾayyad al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (1707–1712) and al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (1716–1720). The latter's abstension from patronage may have been motivated either by his low opinion of the Imām al-Mahdī or his lack of funds for such luxuries.

The Imāms were not the only patrons of poetry. Zayd b. ʿAlī al-Jaḥḥāf, the governor of Mocha, was panegyrized by the poet Yaḥyā b. Mūsā al-Fāriʿ (d. 1698/1699).[20] Al-Shawkānī, writing more than a century later, opined that Mocha was the greatest governorship in Yemen.[21] Zayd b. ʿAlī was relieved of his position in 1669/1670 and replaced by al-Ḥasan b. al-Muṭahhar al-Jarmūzī (d. 1688/1689), who ruled the port city of Mocha and the Ḥarāz mountains for the Imām al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl.[22] "Many of the outstanding poets of his time panegyrized him like the *shaykh* Ibrāhīm al-Hindī and other Yemeni poets and a group of poets from Bahrain and Oman," writes al-Shawkānī.[23] To this list al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Habal should be added.[24] Roughly a century later, the poet, scribe, and architect ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAmmārī (d. 1798/1799) began his illustrious career by proving himself as a secretary in Mocha's chancery.[25] Later he was made governor of Ḍawrān, Ḥarāz, Mocha and Raymah by al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās.[26]

The court of ʿAlī b. al-Imām al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl (d. 1684/1685), governor of Lower Yemen, and a rival to the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad, was an important center of poetry. "His presence was a

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[19] Ibid., 1:273; Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 89.

[20] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:368.

[21] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 450: "*Wa-huwa* [*bandar al-makhāʾ*] *akbaru wilāyatin fī l-quṭri l-yamānī*."

[22] Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Taʾrīkh ahl al-kisāʾ*, 118.

[23] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 226: "*Wa-madaḥahu aʿyānu l-shuʿarāʾi fī zamanihi ka l-shaykhi ibrāhīma l-hindiyyi wa-ghayrihi min shuʿarāʾi l-yamani wa-jamāʿatun min shuʿarāʾi l-baḥrayna wa-ʿumāna*."

[24] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:508.

[25] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 451.

[26] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 2:136.

gathering-place for people of breeding and refinement" writes Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī.[27] The governor was an excellent panegyrist himself.[28] He employed two poets, Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mirhabī, as his secretaries.[29] The latter composed panegyric on the governor, as did Ibrāhīm al-Hindī, Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Yāfiʿī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yanbuʿī, and Saʿīd b. Muḥammad al-Samaḥī.[30]

Other individual retainers of the Imāms generated their own centers of gravity as patrons of the arts. For example, Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ began his career by inheriting his father's position as the manager of the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad's stables, an important military post. According to Luṭf Allāh al-Jaḥḥāf, he went on to become a close advisor to the Imāms al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn (1716–1727), his son al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (1727–1748), and al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās (1748–1775).[31] A significant portion of al-Fāyiʿ's *dīwān* records panegyric poetry about him that was sent to him by many poets of his time.

Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ's career spans virtually the entire period of intensive poetic production in the eighteenth century. A wealthy and learned man, he had a substantial library, and his serious interest in poetry (particularly *ḥumaynī* poetry) can be discerned from the comments he makes in his *dīwān*. Given these facts, this man may have been the driving force behind the efflorescence of classical and vernacular poetry in Yemen in the eighteenth century. One can imagine that this skilled advisor was able to convince the Imāms, particularly the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad, that funding poets was an endeavor of the utmost importance.

Poets also focused their attentions on the brothers ʿAlī and Muḥsin b. Aḥmad al-Rājiḥ, viziers of the Imām al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (1727–1748). Al-Shawkānī said that Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib (d. 1756/1757), poet and author of *Dhawb al-dhahab bi-maḥāsin man shāhadtu fī ʿasrī min ahl al-adab* "praised the two of them excessively" (*madaḥahumā wa-bālagha fī dhālika*).[32] He also says that Abū Ṭālib's

[27] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasānī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:421: "*Wa-kānat ḥaḍratuhu maʾlafan li-ahli l-adabi wa l-ẓarfi.*"
[28] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 441.
[29] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasānī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:423; 3:343.
[30] Ibid., 2:421.
[31] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:408.
[32] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 595.

biography of the Imām al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim was really about these two viziers.[33] After they died, he attached himself to the jurisconsult (*faqīh*) Ismāʿīl al-Nihmī, the would-be ruler of Ṣanʿāʾ, then ruler of Mocha.[34] The poet Shaʿbān Salīm b. ʿUthmān al-Rūmī (d. 1736/1737) devoted one *dīwān* to the Imām al-Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn and another to the Rājiḥī viziers.[35]

As I have mentioned, the Zaydī emir of Mecca Zayd b. Muḥsin employed the poet Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan[36] for a time. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, the author of *Nasmat al-saḥar fī man tashayyaʿa wa-shaʿar*, left the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad's court for Mecca, where for two years he earned money by praising the local nobles.[37] This Imām's main panegyrist, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Ānisī ("al-Zanamah"), spent time in Mecca praising the emirs; however, he was forced to flee when a number of them considered a line he had written so heretically hyperbolic that he merited death.[38]

The notables and governors of Kawkabān were intermittently panegyrized by the poets al-Mahdī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAshabī[39] (d. 1698/1699), Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Zuhayrī[40] (d. 1799/1800), and Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbdallah al-Ṭall[41] (d. 1809/1810). The poet Isḥāq b. Yūsuf b. al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl (d. 1759/1760) served Yaḥyā b. ʿAlī al-Shāṭibī in Taʿizz for years.[42] The poet ʿAbdallah b. al-Ḥusayn al-Shāmī, a member of the Safīnah Circle, who traveled from Ṣanʿāʾ to Taʿizz in the company of its new governor, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Akhfash, found the man so stupid, miserly, and demented that he composed a humorous treatise on his journey with him.[43]

Why did many of these men risk exile, imprisonment, and death to write laudatory poems for important people? As biographical dictionaries make clear, poetry was a means of upward mobility. One could amass wealth as a panegyrist or use poetry as a stepping stone to high

[33] Ibid., 596.
[34] Ibid., 596.
[35] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:753.
[36] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:299.
[37] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:421.
[38] Ibid., 1:75; al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 55.
[39] Al-Ḥibshi, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 272–273.
[40] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:76.
[41] Ibid., 1:288.
[42] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:327.
[43] Ibid., 2:92–93.

office. Since servants of the state needed a high degree of literacy, a competent poet with a decent prose style would likely be able to draft official documents. In short, a competent poet could be a competent administrator. The meteoric rise of ʿAli b. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAmmārī exemplifies this notion.[44]

We find numerous examples of individuals who left their careers as craftsmen to compose panegyric or supplemented their meager artisanal incomes by composing and selling the occasional poem. Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Yāfiʿī (d. 1110/1698), for example, who became a central figure in the circle of poets surrounding the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad, was a former shopkeeper.[45] Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā "al-Khayyāṭ", who was a tailor, panegyrized the Imām al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn.[46] Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Nākhūdhah quit his job as a tailor so that he could panegyrize the notables of his age.[47]

Al-Shawkānī recalled that the poet Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ruqayḥī's (d. 1748/1749) hands were always black because he was a dyer.[48] When, in his old age, some people in Kawkabān teased him, he composed the following couplet: "Honor is [to be found] in knowledge and in a hand blackened by the dyer's craft, not in the companionship of rulers. The only reason that I have pursued all of these goals is to unite knowledge and deed."[49] Although poets, such as Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Yāfiʿī and Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Ānisī (al-Zanamah), became wealthy, poetry did not guarantee economic self-sufficiency.[50] Take, for example, the story of Shaʿbān Salīm b. ʿUthmān al-Rūmī, a shopkeeper and physician who made money with his poetry.[51] In his old age, when he could no longer earn a living any other way, he had to sell his poetry at a low price to whomever would pay for it.[52] He died poor.[53]

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[44] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 450; Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 2:136.
[45] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:6.
[46] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:37; Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:587.
[47] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 287–288.
[48] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 71.
[49] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:126: "*Al-majdu fī l-ʿilmi wa l-kaffi l-musawwadi min / fanni l-ṣabāghati lā fī ṣuḥbati l-duwali, fa-mā saʿaytu ilā hādhā wa-dhāka maʿan / illā li-ajmaʿa bayna l-ʿilmi wa l-ʿamali.*"
[50] Ibid., 1:6, 76.
[51] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:228.
[52] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 292.
[53] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:236.

Informal Poetic Patronage

The production of poetry in eighteenth-century Yemen was by no means limited to rulers, their hangers-on, and those seeking riches. A number of important judges and jurisconsults were also poets. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī was judge (*qādī*) of al-ʿUdayn in the highlands above the Tihāmah who composed panegyrics to the Imām al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn.[54] The poet Aḥmad b. Luṭf al-Bārī al-Zubayrī (d. 1869/1870) was also the judge of al-ʿUdayn.[55] The poet Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qāṭin was judge of Thulā and later managed the pious endowments (*awqāf*) of Ṣanʿāʾ.[56] Al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Fusayyil (d. 1771/1772), a member of the Safīnah circle, was a jurisconsult.[57] The nineteenth-century poet Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Qārrah, most famous for his *ḥumaynī* poetry, was a judge in Lāʿah, near Kawkabān.[58]

One group of poets, known as the "crazed gentlemen" (*ẓurafāʾ al-majānīn*), possessed a tumultuous relationship with its patrons. This expression appears in *al-Ḥaḍāʾiq al-muṭālaʿah min zuhūr abnāʾ al-ʿaṣr shaqāʾiq* of ʿAbdallah b. ʿĪsā b. Muḥammad (d. 1808/1809). The writer describes a poet as belonging to "the crazed gentlemen and the souls of the orchards" (*ẓurafāʾ al-majānīn wa-anfus al-basātīn*).[59] Although the subject of this passage, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Abī l-Rijāl (d. 1747), was well educated, his speech became full of solecisms when a *jinniyyah* named Zāmirah possessed him. His linguistic difficulties crescendoed when he adopted languages that he believed to be Hindi and Persian.[60] But Aḥmad b. ʿAlī's insanity was, according to this source, of an inoffensive nature.[61] Though his madness seems also to have set in after his writing career had ended, his description as a "crazed gentleman" indicates that he probably remained a welcome guest at literary gatherings.

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[54] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:251.
[55] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:173.
[56] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 128; Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:277.
[57] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:422.
[58] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:105.
[59] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:185; al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 444–445. Stories concerning wise madmen (*ʿuqalāʾ al-majānīn*) constitute a recognized genre of medieval Arabic literature.
[60] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:185.
[61] Ibid., 1:185.

The Imām al-Mutawakkil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn's panegyrist Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī "al-Khayyāṭ" was the victim of medical malpractice, which, al-Ḥūthī says, prevented him from sleeping for thirteen years and "disturbed his temperament" (*ikhtalla mizājuhu*).[62] (The poet's apparent fondness for coffee leads one to suspect the veracity of this report.)[63]

Not every insane poet was tolerated. Al-Ḥūthī said that Ismāʿīl b. al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Rijāl (d. 1776/1777) was a mad fool who complained of how the *jinn* had taken him over. Nevertheless, he was a prolific composer of flawless poetry.[64] The verbal attacks he launched against the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad led to the poet being gagged and restricted to a limited area of Ṣanʿāʾ (see p. 75).[65]

The craziest of the "crazed gentleman" seems to have been al-Muṭahhar b. al-Ḥasan, "Abu l-Ṭaḥāṭiḥ" (d. 1808/1809). (Abū l-Ṭaḥāṭiḥ was the name of his familiar spirit.)[66] According to Zabārah, al-Muṭahhar's talents in composition first manifested themselves when he was a child in a Qurʾān school in Ṣaʿdah where he satirized his teacher. Luṭf Allāh al-Jaḥḥāf related how he became a Sufi in Ṣanʿāʾ, immersed himself in apocalyptic thinking (*ʿilm al-malāḥim*), and soon proclaimed himself the messiah (*al-muntaẓar*).[67] He began insisting that his proper name was "al-Muṭahhir" ("The Purifier") and claimed to make regular contact with archangels.[68]

Zabārah's sober tone seems to give way when describing Abū l-Ṭaḥāṭiḥ's eccentricities: "He did not pay much heed to the manners of polite society, dwelling on the open road with youths and the masses and mingling with the circles of magicians and those who play with monkeys."[69] "He had nothing" (*ṣifr al-yadayn*) and "the earth was his bed" (*firāshuhu l-turābu*).[70] Zabarah continues:

> He used to wrap a turban on and wear it for a long time, without undoing it, until it was black and falling apart over his shoulders. It was topped

[62] Ibid., 1:588.
[63] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:40–41.
[64] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:348.
[65] Ibid., 1:349.
[66] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 2:361.
[67] Ibid., 2:359.
[68] Ibid., 2:360.
[69] Ibid., 2:361: "*Wa-kāna qalīla l-mubālāti bi-ḥifẓi nāmūsi l-adabi, fa-yaqifu maʿa l-ṣibyāni wa l-ʿawāmmi bi-qāriʿati l-ṭarīqi, wa-yaqūmu ʿalā ḥalaqi l-mushaʿbidhīna wa l-lāʿibīna bi l-qurūdi wa-ghayrihim.*"
[70] Ibid., 2:362.

> with filth and birds sometimes loosed their droppings on it. He wore a shirt and walked about in it for a year without washing it until it was filthy, wiping his snotty nose on its sleeves and making a detestable sight for whoever saw him.[71]

Despite these eccentricities, Zabārah considered him "a stallion poet" (*fī fuḥūli l-shuʿarāʾ*). His wonderful stories, wit, sharp memory, and poetic ability, in both classical poetry and in *ḥumaynī*, made him an honored guest at elite gatherings. The Imām whom he panegyrized sent him presents.[72]

Qāt, *Coffee, Tobacco, and Wine*

What made it so that someone like Abū l-Ṭaḥāṭiḥ could have been welcome at the formal evening literary gatherings that were held by the notables of Ṣanʿāʾ? During these gatherings, men partook of a consciousness-altering substance—such as *qāt*, coffee, tobacco, or alcohol—and engaged in decorous conversation and poetic composition.[73] These gatherings were formal in that they possessed their own decorum, which is brought out best by a pair of *mubayyatāt* of al-Khafanjī, who presided over one of the most famous Yemeni literary gatherings of all time. The first poem, "the conditions for the gathering" (*shurūṭ al-jalsah*), takes the form of an address directed at "Yūshaʿ" (an obviously Jewish name) who, it becomes clear, is the speaker's servant (*duwaydar*). It describes the evening as the optimum time for the assembly and presents opinions on the proper number of participants:

> The limit [to the number] of companions is seven,
> So there is still ardor in companionship.
> The maximum is nine.
> After nine [you may as well] pick nits from your hair.
> They say three [guests] is an orchard and four is a mental hospital.
> The brothers legislated this—these are the strict rules.[74]

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[71] Ibid., 2:361.

[72] Ibid., 2:362.

[73] A more comprehensive treatment of this topic can be found in Mark Wagner, "The Debate Between Coffee and *Qāt* in Yemeni Literature", in *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 8.2 (2005): 121–149.

[74] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 134r; Muḥammad al-ʿAmrī, *Safīnat al-adab wa l-taʾrīkh*, 3:1369: "*ḥadd al-nadāmā sabʿah / fī l-uns tibqā lawʿah / wa-muntahāhum tisʿah / wa-baʿd tāsiʿ yiqṣaʿ / qālū thalāthah bustān / wa-arbaʿah māristān / qad qawnanūhā l-ikhwān / hādhih shurūṭuh wa-aqṭaʿ*."

According to this poem, one is to recline in a designated manner, the guest's space must be kept tidy and the room itself should be spotless with a neutral smell, and the servant must mind the waterpipe carefully but be unobtrusive in doing so. The poem also gives instructions on how to flirt and what type of food to serve. Guests are not to speak out of turn. At the end of the poem—as in other poems by al-Khafanjī—the order breaks down into a riot of cacophonous laughs.

The second poem, "Describing His Veranda" (*fī waṣf saqīfatihi*) contrasts the carefully ordered atmosphere of the cosmopolitan salon with the lives of tribesmen:

> When someone speaks, everyone should listen to him, until his speech is entirely consumed,
> Discussion still rouses painful love in you and as for laughing, if one makes a joke everybody laughs,
> [AR: Since speech requires careful crafting do not talk over one another,]
> These are the rules of promotion and of demotion, and he who breaks them is considered a bleater,
> If they are not followed it may as well be a meeting of the Banī Malkhaj[75] who may, if they so choose, raid Bakīl.[76]

Some literary gatherings, notably al-Khafanjī's "Safīnah" and Yaḥyā b. al-Muṭahhar's "Samarqand," were named after the salon in which they met. The activities that went on at such gatherings, such as chewing *qāt* or drinking coffee, influenced the themes of poems written in this era of poetic efflorescence. In the nineteenth century, a number of poets expressed hyperbolic partisanship for either coffee or *qāt*, perhaps as a means of escape from the weightier issues of *madhhab* partisanship that dominated the intellectual scene. The best example of this is Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muʿallimī's (d. 1861/1862) rhymed prose narrative, *Tarwīḥ al-awqāt fī l-mufākharah bayn al-qahwah wa l-qāt*.[77]

The poetry of coffee and *qāt* takes the classical wine poem (*khamriyyah*) as its model. This association follows naturally from the word "coffee" (*qahwah*), a metonym for wine. The oxymoron of a licit "*qahwah*" became a stock motif. ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq (d. 1777/1778), a poet who seems to have celebrated both coffee and *qāt*, writes:

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[75] Proverbial for a waste of time—the contemporary expression is "Banū Milakhfaj."

[76] AR 100–101; *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 108r–v.

[77] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 304; al-Ḥibshī, *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 357–378; Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 172.

> A coffee that would make one forget the daughter of the vine kept us occupied past the evening prayer,
> Its body is a melting agate, bubbles adorning its throats, like gold,
> The nobles do not have to fear the raid of the rebuker when they drink excessively of it,
> Fill the glasses from its little pot! Pass them around—they are my furthest hope!
> Then, servant, sing the poem I composed on it with an enchanting versification,
> For [the coffee] together with the poem with the singer is ecstasy within ecstasy within ecstasy.[78]

Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī "al-Khayyāṭ," the poet who is said to have been prevented from sleeping for thirteen years, wrote a famous poem describing a kind of coffee cake (*maʿṣūbah*). Before lauding the qualities of this cake in grandiose, almost mythological terms, he describes its accompanying beverage:

> My friend, the nightingale cries out in the bushes and morning is made manifest by light,
> Awake to a morning drink—dew has punctuated the ground and the morning clouds have effaced the line of stars,
> In the morning [the sound of] the grinder mesmerized us—It was a concert that needed no strings,
> Sip the liquor of the coffee bean that allows us to dispense with the first pressings of the first fruits of a fine wine.[79]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā identifies this poem as having been designed to echo Abū Nuwās's "Welcome to Spring that Arrives in Adar and [Lights up] Bushes [with Flowers]" (*marḥaban bi l-rabīʿi jā fī adhāri / wa-bi-anwāri bahjati l-ashjāri*).[80] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā's lamented brother, Zayd, describes the prized Sharisī variety of coffee, punning on "*sharis*," a word which means "quarrelsome," but which has been translated as "nasty" in the following poem:

> God bless this husk-coffee—in the pot appearing to be [precious] musk in its exalted color and in its aroma,
> [The place called] Nasty gave us its loveliness, so marvel at a tenderness that we received from Nasty.[81]

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[78] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 304.
[79] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:40.
[80] Ibid., 2:41.
[81] Ibid., 2:150; Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:702.

Here, the poet's use of the word "husk" may indicate that he was describing *qishr*, a drink made with the husks of the coffee bean. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn "al-Qārrah" writes:

> Pass to the lover some liquor from the pot, dressed in a silk robe adorned with gold.
> Religiously permissible (there is no sin in it for the drinker)—and "'Uṣmān" boasts of its taste with "Akhraf",[82]
> It shines on the branches while it is an emerald, then becomes a glittering ruby that should be picked.[83]

A pair of verses from this poem clarifies the importance of coffee at literary gatherings:

> It washes away the coarseness from a man's nature,
> And drinking it cleanses the sludge from life,
> When the boor tastes it he becomes charming and it shows kindness to his mouth.[84]

From the 1660s until the mid-eighteenth century, Yemen was the center of the international coffee trade.[85] In al-Muʿallimī's imaginary debate, a woman called Coffee says to a man called *Qāt*,

> Don't you know, rebel, that contention is a hard road to travel? You have made me, O disgusting one, one of your wives and a [constant] companion in your mornings and in your evenings. Do you think I suffer you out of pious dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) when my argument against you is bright and pristine? I am the one who is lovely to drink and my nicknames have overtaken the East and the West. Merchants from the ports seek me and enter the dreaded seas to obtain me and [then their] ships carry me to Byzantium and all of the lands.[86]

Coffee's introduction to Yemen and the world was associated with several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Sufis, one of them the *ḥumaynī* poet Abū Bakr al-ʿAydarūs.[87]

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[82] This may be a proverb but I have not been able to locate any discussions of it.
[83] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 217.
[84] Ibid., 218.
[85] Peter Boxhall, "The Diary of a Mocha Coffee Agent," in *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 102–118.
[86] ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī, *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 362.
[87] Al-Ḥibshī, *Awaliyyāt yamaniyyah fī l-adab wa l-taʾrīkh* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-jāmiʿiyyah li l-dirāsāt wa l-nashr wa l-tawzīʿ, 1991), 141–152; Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1985), 14–24.

The Sufi and *ḥumaynī* poet Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sūdī (d. 1525/1526), who "loved to drink coffee night and day," used luxurious clothing and valuables to keep a fire burning constantly for brewing coffee.[88] Once, he fed the fire with a gift from the Ṭāhirid sultan, ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. Confronted by the sultan, al-Sūdī withdrew the gift from the fire unscathed.[89] The Imām al-Mahdī Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan (1676–1681) ordered coffee bushes uprooted in a display of zeal.[90] Nevertheless, the puritanical Ibn al-Amīr composed poetry in praise of coffee.[91] Coffee continued to be exported from Yemen in the nineteenth century (as it is today) and, as al-Muʿallimī's work shows, exercised a hold on the cultural imagination. Nineteenth-century Ottoman officials held out the possibility of rejuvenating the Yemeni coffee industry.[92] Today, liberal opponents of *qāt* use also invoke this trope.

Qāt seems to have enjoyed far greater popularity than coffee. Like coffee, *qāt* possessed a longstanding association with Islamic mysticism. Like coffee, its poetic descriptions drew inspiration from descriptions of wine. ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq (d. 1777/78) writes the following about *qāt*:

> Among the intoxicants there is none like *qāt* to guide happiness to every heart,
> What a difference! What a difference! Red [wine] cannot compare to it even if it is passed around to the companions in flagons.[93]

A poem that al-Muʿallimī identifies as the work of the Sufi Ḥātim al-Ahdal (d. 1604/1605) can be found in *takhmīs* form in a manuscript of Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan's (d. 1699/1700) *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*.[94] The author of the interpolated lines, ʿAbdallah b. al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn, was the father of the *ḥumaynī* poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn. This enthusiastic and clumsy poem emphasizes the numinous qualities of *qāt*. The lines of Ḥātim al-Ahdal's original poem are indicated by bold print:

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[88] ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs, *Taʾrīkh al-nūr al-sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub, 1985), 143.
[89] Ibid., 144.
[90] Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 82; Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 228.
[91] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:68.
[92] Thomas Kuhn—personal communication.
[93] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 304.
[94] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī attributed the original poem to ʿAbdallah. *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:295; al-Ḥibshī, *Majmūʿ al-maqāmāt al-yamaniyyah*, 372.

O you who refresh my soul, my fragrant herb, and my repose,
The apple of my eye, my wine and my pleasures,
If you wish to be freed from the bonds of blame,
Pass ruby branches of *qāt* with verdant topaz leaves!
Its greenness resembles the Garden of Paradise,
Its scent puts that of the flowers of the Garden to shame,
Its intoxication makes one forget the drunkenness of wine and the goblet,
Consuming it clears my mind and seeing it clears my eye—It sweetens my life and my times,
It disperses cares and gathers happiness,
It drives away ignorance and plants thoughts,
It makes the mind and the imagination productive and raises them up,
Its hearts [or "its leaves"] **hold secrets and deposit them in our hearts, where they course through our joys,**[95]
My inner soul is a Ḥaram for it and my heart is its homeland,
My soul is its Kaʿba and it will always worship it,
It is the Burāq that has the heart for its sleeping stall,
A Burāq for my heart's ascension when the Gabriel of my soul ascends with it to the highest heavens,
When it reached my furthest lote tree it prescribed
The lights of the secrets of thoughts, then it went out,
Even if the sea were to be drained from the two worlds it would not be exhausted,
It is an olive whose oil ignites the wick of the light in the lamp of my niche,
When I saw the trees putting forth leaves of it,[96]
Its branches always obediently putting forth stalks,
[And] the pious using it to gaze into existence,
[Then] I saw that my heart was its heart, out of love, and it is no innovation to crave *qāt*,
You see that it is a rest for spirits and nourishment for hearts,
It feels like silk brocade and it has a fine bouquet,
And the mind has penetrated into the Sacred World,
All desires are gathered within it and thus all wills move toward it,
Its effect on the Prince of Existence is enchantment,
And its actions, as regards the mandatory duties, are [in accordance] with authoritative traditions,
Wonder is its purview and it makes everything lovely,
The softness of bodies, the tincture of cheeks, the pampering of roses, and the joy of gustation,
How many virtues are gathered in it and it then surpassed!
How many fine points of law it has charged to a contract!
And how many legal treatises on good works it has composed!

[95] "*Masarrāt*" ("joys") puns on "*massār*" ("the stems of aromatic plants").
[96] "*Mawraqah*" puns with "*waraq*"—leaf.

How many characteristics have our trustworthy *shaykh*s related from *sayyid*s, rooted in religion,
How many secrets that were not manifest,
And how many treasures shine in [its] banners!
How many views of it are now, from it, insightful!
Eat it for what you wish from this world and the next, hoarding benefits and driving off harmful things,
How many a lover was smitten while consuming it?
Be happy with it in fear of God and in perspicacity,
Beauty and radiance will increase in you [when] you eat it,
In a bite of it, say the Guides, is a radiance that illuminates the secret of praying for forty days in solitude,
It is the scale of the balance of my heart—the goal of my thoughts,
The sextile of my Saturnine heart, the Jupiter of my moon,
The Mars of Venus, the writer of stars,
Whenever I wanted my sight to rise to the sky, to existence, *qāt* served as my stairs,
[Allowing me] to cross the stars is one of its merits,
And my apprehension of meanings is one of its fine points,
Enabling me to understand the finer points of revelation (*al-mathānī*) is one of its finer points [too],
It elevated me to their furthest truths and cleansed the filth from the surface of my mirror,
It cleans my heart of impurity and of dirt,
And it makes deformity leave me and leave my body,
It makes existence manifest for me with its lovely appearance,
In purification my selfhood becomes apparent—it reckons me a self for it and I recognize that it is a self for me,
O people of al-Nuʿmān from among the *bān* branches of the sandy hillock,
If you want to arrive at a reserved pasture and you have a meeting there,
Qāt, on the path of the people of God, is the best thing to meet,
Its natural makeup produces a meeting—add up its numerical value and understand my hints![97]
Understand the hints of my cradle and my world,
Its distinguishing sign is ageless—I vie with a sea of knowledge,
Whether I mention [God] by myself or mention [Him] in secret,
The hearts of its square roots offer nourishment and they command us to be pious by means of eloquent symbolic statements.[98]

[97] Professor G.J. van Gelder suggests that the poet is urging readers to see the correspondence between the word "*al-qāt*", which equals 532 and the word "*iltiqāʾ*", which possesses the same numerical value.

[98] This, the longest version of the poem that I have seen, comes from Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl*, 207v–209r.

The poem concludes by adjuring its reader to "understand the hints" (*ishārāt*). A diagram follows, whose image is evidently intended to unlock the etymological secrets of the word *qāt* by manipulating its normal orthography. In this diagram, the meanings of nourishment (*qūt*), fear of God (*tuqā* / *ittaqi*), performing service (*qatā*), and desiring (*tāqa*) are suggested pictorially.[99] *Qāt* was designated "the sustenance of the righteous" ("*qūt al-ṣāliḥīn*") even outside of Sufi circles.[100] The above poem is most striking in its use of religious motifs, such as the "Light Verse." The mystic chewer of *qāt* replicates the prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey (*isrā*) as in the line, "A Burāq, a ladder for my heart when the Gabriel of my soul ascends with it to the highest heavens."[101]

Eighteenth-century Zaydī noblemen dispensed with such pious sentiment when describing *qāt*. The image of the green wad of *qāt* in the mouth of a lovely youth became a beloved, if bizarre, trope.[102] Homoeroticism, whether prompted by male guests or by the attendant, played an important role in the poetry associated with such literary gatherings.[103] In this, the poetry of *qāt* shows affinities with its vinous predecessor, the *khamriyyah*. Ibrāhīm al-Hindī (d. 1689/90) writes:

> When [every] heart had inclined towards the beauty of the young man's mouth, with *qāt* in it, I compared it—
> [To white] pearls sprouting from a [red] agate, separated by a melting [green] emerald.[104]

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[99] One apocryphal poem attributed to ʿUmar b. ʿAlī al-Shādhilī, the putative discoverer of coffee, finds similar secrets embedded in the word "coffee" (*qahwah*). It is a mystical acronym for "wine" (*qahwah*), "right guidance" (*hudā*), "love" (*wudd*), and "passion" (*hiyām*). Al-Ḥibshī, *Awwaliyyāt yamaniyyah*, 151.

[100] Al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar*, 3:252; Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:122; al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 215.

[101] Another example of an ostensibly pious poem on *qāt* is the poem by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿUjayl (d. 1602/1603) in al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar*, 3:351–352.

[102] *Qāt* is steadily chewed over a period of hours, a large viscous ball forming in the cheek, new leaves and stems being added little by little. The corner of this ball can be seen when the chewer speaks. It should be noted that, in keeping with the elaborate decorum of the *qāt* chewing session, the act of chewing itself is meant to possess a certain grace. In Yemen today, facial tissues are among the necessary supplies for the chewer to bring to the session. They are used to swab the green spittle from the corners of his mouth.

[103] A: A long time ago the servant (*duwaydar*), a person of low status, used to sleep with participants in such gatherings.

[104] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:35.

ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl (d. 1722/23) describes "the color of an emerald amidst pearls against the agate color of the lips" (*lahā lawnu l-zumurrudi bayna durrin / ʿalā lawni l-ʿaqīqi mina l-shafāti*).[105] Muḥammad Zabārah devotes a discussion to a poet of the last century who excelled "at composing similes on *qāt* in the mouth of a beauty" (*tashbīhi l-qāti fī fami l-malīḥi*). This man writes:

> When he appeared, black-eyed and smiling, it was as if the moon drove off dusk's darkness.
> The *qāt* in his mouth was a turquoise, his lips were ruby, and his face was like the dawn.
> I said in wonder: "is his smile 'the turquoise of dawn or the ruby of sunset?'"[106]

A *ḥumaynī* poem by al-Jaḥḥāf on *qāt* constitutes a fully-realized descriptive tableau. The second and third strophes are noteworthy in that they obfuscate what is being described: the youth or the *qāt* (what Philip Kennedy called the "erotic in bacchic"):

> [For the] appetite, my friend, *qāt* holds delights
> So bring me some, bring me topaz branches
> Whose leaves are brocaded banners for man,
> The happiness in them is a veritable army,
>
> There is nothing like a sprig of *qāt* in the hand of a slender gazelle,
> Slim, guarding the flowers of [his] cheeks from one who stares at him,
> Standing lissome of build and tempting, more delicate than a twig,
> With a shining countenance, beautiful in attributes and in essence,
>
> His waist is so thin he is liable to get tangled,
> When he walks he bends like a drinker of fine wine,
> [Though] he doubles over he is singular in beauty and in value,
> His *qāt* is superior to goblets of Babylonian wine [i.e., of a very old vintage],
>
> I will have none of drinking wine, my friend
> *Qāt* contains a drunkenness that wine does not,
> It gives souls endless comfort and happiness
> How many miracles it has wrought with its dewy branches! […][107]

After receiving a particularly fine bundle of *qāt* during a shortage, ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl likens it to a woman: "A bundle shining like the

[105] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 217.
[106] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:35.
[107] Al-Jaḥḥāf, *Dīwān*, 107v–108r.

full moon—[my] innards yearn for its golden *qāt*, free from the palms of the envious, glimmering, as beautiful as a young girl, a virgin."[108]

Like wine for earlier poets, *qāt* was the object for lavish description, occasionally bordering on the mythological. Eroticism, both male and female, inspires many *qāt* poems. The association between wine and *qāt* was explicitly articulated through the use of the literary techniques of the wine poem. This poem of Muḥsin b. ʿAbd al-Karīm's (d. 1849/50) captures the libertine spirit of some *khamriyyāt* and redirects it in the service of *qāt*:

> May rain water the worthless (*ʿāfish*) and frowning (*ʿubasāʾ*), sources of *qāt*, so they will never be miserable,[109]
> For *qāt* gives energy whereas wine, when sipped, induces languor,
> When the vapors of lethargy take the people and the eyes are about to shut,
> *Qāt* scares them off just as the remembrance of God scares off Satan when he whispers,
> There is no time like its time—there is none more refreshing to the breaths nor more precious,
> The happy doves of its boughs are hunted so that they will drive off this sadness,
> So give me [of it] rows of topazes clothed in silk brocade.[110]

Evocations of wine in poems celebrating *qāt* were by no means purely academic. According to the *dīwān* of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, participants in his literary gatherings chewed *qāt* and drank wine (*khamr*).[111] The Yemeni highlands produce a wide variety of grapes.[112] Yemeni Jews produced wine from pre-Islamic times, as evidenced by poems in the *Mufaḍḍaliyāt*.[113] Since wine was not forbidden to

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[108] Ibn Abī l-Rijāl, *Dīwān*, 54r-v: *wa-rabṭatin mithla badri l-timmi musfaratin / tāqat ilāʾ qātihā l-musfari aḥshāʾu, salīmatin min akuffi l-mūlaʿīna bihā / ka-annahā ghādatun fī l-ḥusni ʿadhrāʾu.*

[109] "Worthless" puns on ʿĀfish, the home of the ʿĀfishī variety of *qāt*. Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yaman*, 572.

[110] Muḥsin b. ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Isḥāq, *Dhawb al-ʿasjad fī l-adab al-mufrad min shiʿr al-muḥsin bin ʿabd al-karīm bin aḥmad* (MS Western Mosque Library *adab* 62) 41v; ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī's reading in *al-Adab al-yamanī* 215–216, is flawed.

[111] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 206. This is a bit curious because *qāt* and alcohol would seem to cancel each other out. Contemporary Yemeni drinkers of hard liquor often indulge in the evening to battle the insomnia that *qāt* produces.

[112] The qualities of the various Yemeni grapes are the topics for several poetic compositions.

[113] Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Muḥammad al-Ḍabbī, *The Mufaḍḍaliyāt: An anthology of ancient Arabian odes*, ed. Charles Lyall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918–1924), poems 12 and 55.

Jews—and was, in fact, necessary for their Sabbath and holiday observances— Muslim authorities permitted Jews to produce wine.[114]

Yemeni Arabic sources report numerous references throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to Jews getting caught selling wine to Muslims. One such incident served as the pretext for a policy advocating the expulsion of the Jews of Yemen that was put into practice in 1668.[115] From this evidence and from anecdotal evidence from the *dīwān* of al-Khafanjī, it seems that the Jewish Quarter was to Biʾr al-ʿAzab what Harlem was to Manhattan's Upper East Side in the early twentieth century. Muslim bon vivants probably ventured into the Jewish Quarter to buy alcohol and seek out sexual liaisons.

Weddings

Poetry, much of it *ḥumaynī*, plays a central role in the wedding ceremonies of well-to-do Yemenis. In his *La médecine de l'âme*, Jean Lambert describes in detail the various phases of the ceremony and the genres of poetry that accompany them. The following synopsis is based on a number of sources, chief among them Joseph Chelhod's "Les Cérémonies du Mariage au Yémen."[116] This ceremony is performed by Yemeni Jews in a similar manner.[117]

Monday (or Tuesday or Wednesday for less affluent families) is "Henna Day" (*yawm al-ḥinnā*). A henna ceremony is arranged for the bride-to-be, attended by her family, the prospective groom's family, and her close friends. Finances allowing, the groom also has a henna ceremony on this day. The next day, "The Day of Inscribing" (*yawm al-naqsh*), the prospective groom's female relations present the female guests with a ceremonial tray containing candles and eggs inscribed

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[114] Was Yemeni wine good? On this question we have the testimony of geologist Pierre Lamare, who worked in Yemen in 1922. Serjeant writes: "From a Frenchman one may accept the statement that the wine resembled Chablis, and that the local distillation compared not too unfavorably with Marc du Burgogne." Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 116.

[115] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:36; Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Taʾrīkh ahl al-kisāʾ*, 176.

[116] *Objets et Mondes*, 13 (1973): 3–34.

[117] Nissim Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman: Ha-Shirah ha-ʿamamit ha-temanit, shirat hanashim* (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1974), 139–147; Yosef Qāfiḥ, *Halikhot Teman, passim*; Erich Brauer, *Ethnologie der Jemenitischen Juden* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchandlung, 1934), 127–130.

(*manqūsh*) with dyed black designs.[118] The bride-to-be's family furnishes the groom's female relatives with *qāt* and seats them in the best spot. Wealthy families hire a a woman musician (*fannānah*), who sits in the middle of the assembled company and performs songs from her repertoire. According to Gamlieli, Jewish women in rural communities who performed at weddings were called "*muraḥḥibāt*."[119] "The *muraḥḥibāt* are wise and experienced women who are knowledgeable in rhetorically complex speech (*leshon melitsah*) and who can not only sing known songs but can compose [new songs] and alter songs when the need arises."[120]

On Thursday, the men of the two families chew *qāt* together while a chanter (*nashshād*) sings pious songs—usually praises of the prophet Muḥammad and his family, especially ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[121] Sometimes an itinerant *maddāḥ* will appear and compose panegyric about the groom.[122] After the evening prayer, the *zaffah* is held. This is the procession of the groom and his family down a public path to the accompaniment of a *nashshād*. At about ten in the evening a *fannān* sings songs largely drawn from the corpus of *ḥumaynī* poetry, notably those set to the music of the *qawmah* suite, and the men dance. At this point, the groom's family fetches the bride and her male relatives. This love poetry must be preceded by the pious singing of the *nashshād* at the *zaffah*. On Friday, the bride's male family members partake in a meal, called "*al-ṣabāḥ*," with the groom and his friends. The groom distributes *qāt*—the pricier the better—to her family. Another *fannān* performs *ḥumaynī* love songs.

On the third day (*al-thālith*), the groom's family hosts the bride's family in their house for a celebration. They may hire another *fannānah*. On the seventh day, the groom's family serves a large lunch.

Jean Lambert observes that *ḥumaynī* poetry juxtaposed Platonic and sensual atmospheres.[123] The performance of Ṣanʿānī singing (the *qawmah* suite) would, on its face, seem to show that the ceremony had degenerated from the spiritual plane of the *nashshād*—chanting

[118] A called the dye *khaṭāb*. This is probably what P and Serjeant call *khiḍāb*: black henna or manganese psilo-melane.

[119] A: this is an old-fashioned word. Today she would be called a *mughanniyah* or a *muzayyinah*.

[120] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 149.

[121] Lambert, *La medecin de l'ame*, 60–70.

[122] Chelhod, "Les Cérémonies du mariage au Yémen," 19–20.

[123] Lambert, *La medecin de l'ame*, 82.

praises of the prophet Muḥammad, the Banū Hāshim, and the groom to an all-male audience—to the thinly veiled sensuality of *ghazal*. Weddings, of course, have functioned as outlets for sexual expression, both controlled and uncontrolled, in other traditional societies. Susan Rasmussen, an anthropologist who worked recently among the Tuareg in the mountains of northern Niger, observed weddings that featured "considerable social license."[124]

While singers and professional musicians were hired, Yemeni polite society tended to look upon them with suspicion. First, the Islamic legality of both music and dancing were only settled with significant dissent. As recently as the 1940s, Imām Yaḥyā banned music, leading the performers of Ṣanʿānī singing to leave for Aden, Ethiopia, and Djibouti.[125] A Lebanese visitor reports seeing a smashed phonograph hanging on a pole along with a thief's hand in the Red Sea port city of al-Ḥudaydah.[126] In banning music, Imām Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (d. 1948) was emulating the revered founder of the Zaydī state in Yemen, Yaḥyā b. Ḥusayn, al-Hādī ilāʾ l-ḥaqq (d. 911).[127] Sung with gravity, *ḥumaynī* poems in the "Ṣanʿānī singing" style—as well as the religious poetry performed at weddings, circumcisions, and *mawlid* ceremonies—were exempted from Imām Yaḥyāʾs ban. He also permitted the broadcast of Ṣanʿānī singing on the radio.[128] According to Nizār Ghānim, Sufi *munshidūn* took the place of singers and subversively set their repertoires of mystical *ḥumaynī* poems to recognizably Ṣanʿānī melodies.[129]

In the Yemeni cultural imagination, music can be a kind of intoxicant. Its purveyors are associated with the consumption of forbidden alcohol and the seduction of chaste women. Playing the *ʿūd* and singing is a tolerable pursuit for the higher social orders; however, accepting

[124] Susan Rasmussen, "Wedding of Calm and Wedding of Noise: Aging Performed and Aging Misquoted in Tuareg Rites of Passage," in *Journal of Anthropological Research* 57 (2001): 278.

[125] Ibid., 146; Jean Lambert, "Musiques régionales et identité nationale," in *Revue d'etudes du monde musulman et mediterraneen* 67 (1993/1994): 176; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 46–47; Nizār Ghānim and Khālid b. Muḥammad al-Qāsimī, *al-Awāṣir al-mūsiqiyyah bayna l-khalīj wa l-yaman* (Beirut: ʿUwaydah, 1987), 151–158; Taminian, "Playing With Words," 34; Schuyler, "Hearts and Minds," 4–5.

[126] Taminian, "Playing With Words," 132.

[127] Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 143.

[128] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 215–219.

[129] Nizār Ghānim and Khālid b. Muḥammad al-Qāsimī name the most famous of these people: Saʿd Yusr (Afrāḥ's grandfather), ʿAbdallah Sharīm, ʿAbdallah al-ʿAmrānī, Muḥammad al-Sakhī, and Muḥammad al-Nuʿmānī. *Al-Awāṣir al-mūsiqiyyah*, 158.

payment for it, which a performer at a stranger's wedding would inevitably do, was considered to be shameful (*ʿayb*).[130] The percussionists would invariably belong to the low status *muzayyin* subgroup whose vocations, such as barber, tanner, and butcher, are bound up in some way with the bodies of men or beasts.

The mingling of spirituality and sexuality, and religious law and its transgression, characterizes both the wedding ceremony and the singing of *ḥumaynī* poetry in the penultimate act of the wedding. Thus, the wedding ceremony serves as a counterpart to the Sufis' *samāʿ* session.[131] A contemporary Ṣanʿānī singer, ʿAlī Manṣūr, tells Jean Lambert:

> When in the presence of [narrow-minded] bigots (*mutazammitīn*) at a wedding I begin with the *zaffā* and pious texts and I gradually introduce refined poetry until they begin to get agitated and move back and forth—I watch them. By the end I sing sensual *ghazal* and they are so heated up that they no longer disapprove. One of them approached me once and said "by God, despite my old age (and begging God's forgiveness), were I a woman I would have married you."[132]

Some of Rasmussen's observations on Tuareg weddings offer ready comparisons to the Yemeni context. For instance, she observes that weddings are "evening festivals that feature nonliturgical music and relaxed social restrictions [that] are held primarily for youths."[133] In addition, the drummers and singers of praise songs were smiths and artisans—people possessing a low social status.[134] Some considered the musical instruments to be associated with Satan and saw weddings in general as un-Islamic.[135] Fraternizing between groups of differing social status was a concern for the Tuareg. Rasmussen writes:

> The evening music festivals following Islamic wedding rituals feature a relaxing of normally reserved conduct between affines. Much flirting and courtship also occurs between persons of different social origins (nobles, smiths/artisans, former slaves, and tributaries), who, in principle, are not supposed to intermarry. These festivals are conveyed in the Air dialect of Tamajaq, the local language, by a separate term, *erawen* (denoting

[130] A Yemenī acquaintance of mine, a talented singer and *ʿūd*-player who earns a low salary as a hospital clerk, has repeatedly turned down lucrative offers to perform at weddings because of this taboo.
[131] Jean Lambert compares the formal gathering to Sufi *samāʿ*. *La médecine de l'âme*, 53.
[132] Ibid., 210.
[133] Rasmussen, "Wedding of Calm and Wedding of Noise," 277.
[134] Ibid., 287–288.
[135] Ibid., 285–286, 277.

> approximately "playing," "games," and "joking" approaching the English sense of "festival."[136]

Like their Tuareg analogues, Yemeni weddings acknowledge their inherent tensions. Rather than glossing over possible socioeconomic disparities between the bride and groom, the ceremony uses poetry and music as ways of addressing and soothing these tensions. For example, a poem might tell the story of a lovely slave girl and a forlorn lover whose disparate backgrounds "even out" as they become bride and groom. Music also serves the purpose of publicizing the wedding. If sexual relations are *not* legitimized with fanfare—which sometimes includes public scrutiny and raised eyebrows—the likelihood of illicit affairs might increase. Hence the insistence in Islam on publicity as a key component of a licit wedding.

After the wedding, when the bride plants her right foot, wet with the blood of a bull, inside the groom's house, her movement is both physical and metaphysical. In the village ritual Gamlieli describes, the bride and groom each step in the blood of a slaughtered animal after washing themselves in a river. At the conclusion of the ceremony and the obligatory seven days of feasting, the bride and the groom shed their wedding clothes at a rock by the river (*ḥajar al-radād*) and swim across without looking back.

Yemeni weddings have separate ceremonies for men and women and the portions of the ceremony that involve poetry are no exception. Women do not participate in the male ceremony, often held in a courtyard, where the musician (*fannān*) performs *ḥumaynī* love poems.[137] Some women, however, don their veils and observe the ceremony from the upper stories of the house. This image appropriately encapsulates Yemeni women's poetry, which often problematizes the stock poetic motifs of *ḥumaynī* love poetry with unusual metaphors and themes. For example, many of these poems describe the bride's pain upon parting from her family.

The poetry sung by women on the "Day of Inscribing" describes leaving home from a young bride's point of view. In many poems such as this one, the speaker makes clear that she does not want to be married, and participants in the session cry as they dance.

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[136] Ibid., 278.

[137] Separation of the sexes was more carefully observed in urban settings than in the villages.

My heart is full of so many sorrows,
Sighs fill it,
Mother, I do not complain to anyone,
[It feels like] a camel is sitting on my heart,
And it has been stabbed with a *janbiyah*.[138]
Mother, I am sad about my family
Have they come to hate me?
They brought me to a country I do not know,
[where the people] do not know me.[139]

Such poems are remarkably frank in their depiction of the bride's trials. One speaker says, "O Mother, O Father, why did you let them sell me—sell your cow and sheep—ransom me with the money!"[140] Poems depicting the bride's frustration accompany the final procession (*zaffah*) to the groom's house, where they take the form of a dialogue between the girl and her father. "He said: What can I do, my daughter? A [bull] has been slaughtered at the door. He said: What can I do, my daughter? This is the law of girls."[141]

These poems display irony: "They made me their slave but the slave girls abuse me. When I go downstairs they say, 'Who is that stranger?' and when I climb up to the roof they say, 'Remarkable! remarkable!'"[142] Their imagery is often surprising: "Mother, my heart is burning like ink when it is written on paper, O Sind, O India, when it rains on you at night do not think it rain—it is a flood of tears from my eyes."[143] Here, ink stands for extreme heat, presumably because it appears to burn the paper where it is applied. Tears like rain are a stock simile of Arabic love poetry. The female composer's partial familiarity with this tradition, observing it furtively from an upper story window, explains both her poems' continuities and their divergences from the tradition.

Poems accompanying the cutting of the bride's hair, her bathing, and her adornment describe her beauty. They often employ erotic imagery,

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[138] The ceremonial dagger worn by tribesmen. Jews did not wear *janbiyah*s so the presence of this image in a Jewish poem attests to the interconfessional nature of Jewish women's poetry. William Brinner's introduction to Mishael Caspi, *Daughters of Yemen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Shoshanah Ṭūbī ("Shamʿah"), a singer of Yemeni women's poetry who emigrated to Israel as a child, has achieved wide renown in Yemen as a representative of an authentic local tradition.

[139] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 167.

[140] Ibid., 168.

[141] Ibid., 184.

[142] Ibid., 166.

[143] Ibid., 166.

and their spice and fruit metaphors emphasize the young woman's fertility. The bride is "a lemon orchard" (*ḥāʾiṭ al-līm*), a "clove orchard" (*ḥāʾiṭ al-zurr*),[144] "a terrace on an irrigation channel that grows cinnamon and cardamom";[145] her "bough is verdant" (*ghuṣūnish rawiyyah*),[146] and her "breasts are like pomegranates."[147] One poet asks, "Where were you, beauty? Where were you hiding? She was hiding in her father's house, behind the high windows."[148] Another poem follows a nearly identical rendition of the preceding line with: "Welcome O girl, [you are] a spring under your house, a spring of yellow clarified butter, and a garden of honey."[149]

Several poems treat the bride's sexuality by describing the groom's attractiveness and the couple's flirtation. One poem combines the bride's bitter sense of abandonment by her family with an erotic attachment to the groom. "You with the sweet red lips, you who climbs down the hills, take me with you and property will be ransom [for my] soul." (*ʿadhīb al-lumā, yā nāzil al-diḥdūḥ, sayyarnī maʿak, wa l-māl yifdā al-rūḥ*).[150] "The dark youth with the silk turban captivated me." (*wa-dahānī al-wald al-akhḍar dhī mishawish bi l-maṣar*).[151]

> You whose hair is plaited, black, and lovely,
> Resting on his hips, say to him: "Hey you!"
> His forehead is the white moon that holds forth at night,
> On the fifteenth night he lights up the darkness.
> His eyebrows are curved like the letter *nūn* on a leaf from a folio volume,
> And his eyes are a goblet full of grape wine.
> His nose is the sharpest sword, molded (or decorated with silver) at its edge,[152]
> His cheeks are pure silver inscribed (*sūjal*) by the Creator, His smile is a flash of lightning (and his reputation is widespread)

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[144] Ibid., 163.

[145] Ibid., 186: "*al-ḥarīwah jirbah ʿalā ghayl, tizraʿ al-qirfah wa-hayl.*"

[146] Ibid., 164.

[147] Ibid., 170, 176

[148] Ibid., 175: "*wayn kuntī yā malīḥah, wayn kuntī makhbiyyah, makhbiyyah fī dār abūhā, fī manāẓir ʿāliya.*"

[149] Ibid., 173: "*wa-riḥbī yā dhal binayah, taḥt dārish sāqiyah, sāqiyah li-samn al-aṣfar, wa l-ʿasal lah jāniyah.*"

[150] Ibid., 158.

[151] Ibid., 190.

[152] The nose (of a man or a woman) is invariably described as a sword in the women's poems collected by Nissim Gamlieli. He explains the metaphor thus: "In Yemen, the ivory handle of a sword or dagger is decorated with granulated silver or gold to make it beautiful. The comparison of the nose to a sword is very widespread in Yemeni poetry." Ibid., 171n4. The image conveys the white color of ivory, the thinness of a sword, and possibly the ornamentation of nose ring(s).

His teeth are like pearls or dew on a flower,
His neck is the neck of a copper coffee pot of fine manufacture,
His chest is like the Jewish Quarter of Ṣanʿā'[153] and al-Rawḍah too,
There the horses can run four abreast.[154]

The penultimate line of this poem, from Damt in Lower Yemen, shows Yemeni Jews' esteem for Ṣanʿā'. The Qāʿ al-Yahūd becomes a place of prestige, with patrician and Muslim al-Rawḍah seemingly added as an afterthought.[155] Some poems contain local references, the beloved being compared to "the moon over al-Jirās" (a village in the south), or her hair to "the ropes over Noble's Well."[156]

The description of the bride's body does not always take the male or female observer's vantage point, however. In one poem, the woman describes herself to her groom as part of a game of flirtation:

She left her father's house and entered the neighbors' house.
She wore a fashionable[157] dress and her eyes were full of happiness.[158]
He said: O beauty, show yourself to me and let me delight in your hair.
She said: go away, naughty man, my hair is the camel's reins.[159]

This refrain repeats throughout the poem and each time, the man asks to see a different part of her body. She rebuffs him but nonetheless describes it to him one part at a time. "My forehead is a moon of Shaʿbān," she says, "my eyebrows are strokes of pens," "my eyes are red jewels," "my nose is the sultan's sword," "my mouth is a string of pearls," "my neck is the gazelle of the orchard," "my [upper] chest is the town square",[160] "my breasts are pomegranates," and "my belly is silky cloth."[161]

Many images in Yemeni women's poetry echo the stock images of male-dominated *ḥumaynī* love poetry. The bride is a crescent moon (*hilāl*). Her smile is "a flash of lightning" (*bāriq baraq*).[162] She is like

[153] This phrase, "*qāʿ ṣanʿā'*," may also simply refer to the city of Ṣanʿā'.
[154] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 165.
[155] Ibid., 183.
[156] Ibid., 163, 172.
[157] "*Fistān ʿalā mūḍah*" i.e., "a dress *a la mode*."
[158] Following Caspi's translation of "*taḍrūb salām*" in *Daughters of Yemen*, 75. (The rest of these translations are mine.)
[159] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 169.
[160] The ideal of beauty here is that her upper chest is smooth and flat. A hemistich in the *Muʿallaqah* of Imrū l-Qays expresses this ideal: "her breastbones are like a burnished mirror" (*tarā'ibuhā maṣqūlatun ka l-sajanjali*).
[161] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 169–170.
[162] Ibid., 176.

a bough of the *bān* tree.[163] "Where is your dove?"[164] "The dove chick chirped."[165] Refuge is sought from Satan and from "the hater" (*al-shānī*).[166] One poem recorded by Gamlieli displays a more marked intertextuality. "O dove of Dūr, O dove of the heights" the speaker adjures.[167] This likely evokes the famous *ḥumaynī* poem of ʿAlī al-ʿAnsī, "O Warbler in Wādī Dūr" (*yā mugharrid bi-wādī dūr*). Al-ʿAnsī mentions the Tihāman town of al-ʿUdayn several times in his *ḥumaynī* poetry. The same woman's poem contains the verse, "Who will be my messenger to ʿUdayn?"[168]

The foregoing discussion of motifs suggests an alternative to the model of Arabic women's poetry that Lila Abu Lughod presents in her work on this subject. She finds a "poetry of personal sentiment" whose relationship to a wider literary tradition is less important than its "social function."[169] By ignoring the formal features of these poems—as well as their relationships to both local folk poetry and elite poetry—and instead merely conveying their message, Abu Lughod limits our view of women's poetry. Using her paradigm, we would find that Yemeni women, like Egyptian Bedouin women, express sadness and sexuality in their wedding poems. Yet we would be unable to evaluate the firm and ultimately subversive links between Yemeni women's poetry and the male literary world.

Like the humorous poetry of the Safinah Circle in the eighteenth century, women's poetry is a countertradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Poems where the bride laments being cast aside by her family and left to the mercy of her in-laws offer a sharp shift in perspective from *ḥumaynī ghazal* and courtly love poetry in general. Poems that describe the beauty of the bride or groom using a pastiche of conventional literary tropes and creative images also subvert the male gaze that is so typical of love poetry. This is especially true of a poem where the female speaker says, in effect, "These are *my* pomegranate breasts and *you* can't touch them!" (p. 99).

Gamlieli makes the intriguing suggestion that, given the overlap in themes and motifs in the poems he studied, they all stem from a single

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[163] Ibid., 171.
[164] Ibid., 186.
[165] Ibid., 177.
[166] Ibid., 176, 180, 195.
[167] Ibid., 180.
[168] Ibid., 181.
[169] Lila Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 181, 28.

collection of women's poems.[170] Unfortunately, no premodern examples of such poems exist in manuscript. The main written source for Yemeni women's poetry is Rabbi Nissim Gamlieli's anthology, *Ahavat Teman*, selections of which Mishael Maswari Caspi translated as *Daughters of Yemen*.[171] Today, mass-marketed wedding songs from Persian Gulf countries are steadily replacing Yemeni women's poems. Collecting and analyzing such poems is an important thread of research.

Madhhab *Partisanship and* Ḥumaynī *Poetry*

The emergence of a Sunni Traditionalist interpretation of Islam from within Zaydī circles and its relationship to the rise of the Qāsimī state is probably the most important social-theological debate in Yemen during this period.[172] The increasingly polarized nature of the debate is reflected in two Zaydī literary figures, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaymī (d. 1738/1739), a *sayyid* of Kawkabān who became a Sunni, and Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, who became a Twelver Shīʿī. The burning questions at the heart of the controversy over *madhhab* played a small yet significant role in *ḥumaynī* poetry.

In Yemen, Shiʿism and literary criticism were interwoven. This idea finds its most concrete expression in the tradition of Yemeni biographical dictionaries of Shīʿī poets. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī juxtaposed contemporary Yemeni Zaydī poets with the great Shīʿī poets of the Arabic literary tradition like al-Kumayt, Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Mutanabbi, and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. This juxtaposition suggested a strong linkage between Shīʿī leanings and poetic excellence.[173] By adopting such a structure, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā made his contemporaries the rightful heirs of both Shiʿism and Arabic poetry.

An anecdote in the earlier dictionary of Shīʿī poets, Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan's *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, exemplifies such a

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[170] Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 149.

[171] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 166–173 and *passim* also contains women's poems.

[172] Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[173] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī was generous in his editorial decisions as to which writers were Shīʿī enough to achieve a place in his dictionary. For example, he includes an entry on Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, whose Sunnism has been conclusively proven by Everett Rowson in "Religion and Politics in the Career of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107.4 (1987): 653–673.

teleological strategy. The author says that his father told him of an "extraordinary coincidence" (*ʿajīb al-ittifāq*). A guest among the notables assembled in Ṣaʿdah in the presence of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan, Yaḥyā b. Aḥmad b. al-Mahdī, recited a poem of self-praise that contained a description of a roan stallion (*ḥiṣān adham*) that Aḥmad b. al-Manṣūr bi llāh owned. He described how the horse left marks on the ground that made sparks. The writer's father thought that he had gotten the description of the horse just right (*aṣāba l-ḥiṣān*) so he recited the following line by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī: "An arrow, whose shooter was in Dhī Salam, struck one in Iraq—you have made your target distant!" (*sahmun aṣāba wa-rāmīhi bi-dhī salami / man bi l-ʿirāqi la-qad abʿadti marmāki*). Immediately afterwards, the news of the horse's death reached the group. "It probably died at that very moment," recounted the writer's father.

This anecdote, which revolves around two meanings of the verb "*aṣāba*"—"to hit the mark" literally and figuratively—, demonstrates the ethos of the Yemeni biographical dictionary of Shīʿī poets. In this anecdote, a great Shīʿī poet of the past mysteriously intercedes in the lives of contemporary Zaydī poets, demonstrating the connection between them.[174]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī's hyperbolic assessment of the poet al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Habal (d. 1668/1669) as "the best Yemeni poet ever" was probably connected to his aggressively Shīʿite verse.[175] In addition to long *qaṣāʾid* elegizing important ʿAlid figures, al-Habal wrote many epigrams that satirized the Companions, particularly Abū Bakr and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Aḥmad al-Shāmī, the contemporary writer who edited al-Habal's *dīwān*, expurgated these lines "out of respect for [the poet]" (*iḥtirāman lahu*)! One scholar has suggested that the invective epigrams of the poet Ibn al-Rūmī were intended for a wide distribution.[176] One could plausibly argue that al-Habal's anti-Sunni epigrams were also aimed at a wide audience.

Despite the raging debate over *madhhab*, the issue did not appear often in *ḥumaynī* poetry. It is likely that many poets considered the theme ill-suited to lyrical verse set to music. In a love poem addressed

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[174] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 96r; Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:231–233.

[175] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:520.

[176] G.J. van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes Towards Invective Poetry (Hijāʾ) in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 39.

to a south Yemeni woman, the *qāḍī* ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī, whom Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib (d. 1756/1757) described as being "like al-Ḥasan al-Habal in the poetry of Shiʿism and *madhhab*," writes:[177]

> May I be your ransom! You are leaving without good reason—My soul! [you left] for my *madhhab* allegiance of all things,
> I would become a Shāfiʿī for you of the lustrous teeth, you pearl-toothed gazelle,
> So what if I raise my hand when I pray, Arab gazelle / I ask: does this constitute *madhhab*?[178]

Although the Republican scholars who edited many *ḥumaynī dīwān*s, including al-ʿAnsī's, would have had a motive to suppress expressions of *madhhab* partisanship, al-Ansī's effort to finesse or even escape from the debate through *ḥumaynī* poetry seems representative. The main thrust of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī's lengthy *ḥumaynī* poem "on Shīʿī and Sunni factionalism" is the minimization of the importance of *madhhab*.[179] Phrases like "love is my *madhhab*" crop up throughout the corpus of *ḥumaynī* poetry, from Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn on.

Since traditional Zaydīs were on the losing side of the ideological battle, calls for non-partisanship seem to have served the interests of the ascendant Sunni-oriented outlook. Isḥāq b. Yūsuf b. al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl (d. 1759/1760), a poet who studied *ḥadīth* with Ibn al-Amir and wrote a treatise advising Zaydī jurists to use *ḥadīth*, wrote a poem that mocked *madhhab* partisanship and triggered a series of treatises. Al-Shawkānī averred that his poetry was well-known among the people.[180] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Shirwānī (d. 1837/1838), a professor of Arabic at Fort William College who anthologized and composed several works, wrote an anti-Shiʿite poem while he still lived in the Tihāmah.[181]

Whereas *ḥumaynī* poetry generally played a limited role in the politics of *madhhab* allegiance in Yemen, one poet used this medium for propaganda. Zabārah describes how the pro-Sunni *ḥumaynī* poet, ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Amīr, who was jailed during the riots in Ṣanʿāʾ in 1801/1802, did the following while imprisoned:

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[177] Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Dhawb al-dhahab bi-maḥāsin man shāhadtu fī ʿaṣrī min ahl al-adab* (Waqf library 1936), 80 (MS not foliated): "*wa-kāna ka l-ḥasan al-habal fī shiʿri l-tashayyuʿ wa l-madhhab*."

[178] Al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr*, 10.

[179] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 150r–151r: "*wa-lahu ayḍan lammā ḥaṣala l-taʿaṣṣubātu fīmā bayna l-shīʿati wa-ahli l-sunnati*"; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 77–78.

[180] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 152–153.

[181] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar* 1:214–215.

> He made uninflected odes, and delivered them to the chanters at the gates and in the markets and on the roads, that excoriated the governors and the ministers and the jurists and every person who was excessive in his religious observance as well as those who were lax with an aspect of the *Sharīʿah*. They gave [the poems] delicate melodies. Children and adults, men and women, scholars and commoners, memorized them.[182]

The following bitter report on the state of poetry which Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī issued becomes intelligible against the backdrop of the various historical developments that impacted the production of poetry in seventeenth-nineteenth century Yemen, notably, the booming market for panegyric poetry and the declining fortunes of traditional Zaydism. This author describes the poet Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Yāfiʿī as "following the Zaydī method of the people of [Ṣanʿāʾ] in *madhhab* but not in poetry."[183] During his time, writes Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā, "the war songs of the regime had gone slack." In addition, "there was not a trace left of virtue, and poetry did not even have a name, indeed, if you wished for a summary one would have to say that knowledge had no lot." Yāfiʿī was a mercenary panegyrist and, perhaps for this reason, "was the standard-bearer of the poets in Yemen."[184] Here, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā turns to more general commentary:

> I (say): God bless him! He dealt with people according to what he knew of their understanding, and [in contrast] the bane of poetry and the poet is the poor understanding of the listener. The "standard" today, in opposition to "The Standard" of Ibn Rashīq is nothing but an ornamentation (*zakhrafah*) and delicacy (*riqqah*) in poetry [that is] written with the pen of coarseness and hidden away. If a would-be poet can write the name of the leader in gold he is considered eloquent and honorable (even if [his work] is withered, unlike the honorable *shaykh*). If one who is intelligent and a fair judge is to be found [he would adjudge that] it is, in the generations past, the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid caliphs who are superior to those with whom we have been afflicted [in our own time] in knowledge, understanding, breeding and virtue. Where is our Maʾmūn with his breeding, forebearance, and perfection? [Where is our] Rashīd with his breeding and courage or [our] valorous and intelligent Muʿtaṣim?

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[182] Ibid., 2:112.

[183] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:87: "*fa-kāna ʿalā manhaji ahlihā* [Ṣanʿāʾ] *al-zaydiyyati fī l-madhhabi lā fī l-shiʿri*."

[184] Ibid., 1:90: "*huwa ḥāmilu liwāʾi l-shuʿarāʾi bi l-yamani*".

> Even the Umayyads had a [more] perfect understanding and could tell pearls from excrement.[185]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī's objection is not panegyric *per se*. To be a Zaydī poet, he implies, and to belong to the tradition of al-Kumayt, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, and al-Mutanabbī, the poetry must be good and the rulers the poets lauded must deserve it. His comments point to the paradoxical situation of poetry and, more broadly, of intellectual life in the Qāsimī state. The triumph over the Ottomans and the unification of Yemen led to a Zaydī dynasty, itself an oxymoron according to the Zaydī conception of *Imāmah*. Poets and pro-Sunni reformers shored up the dynasty to face its crisis of legitimacy, further distancing them from their collective roots in Yemeni Zaydism.

The declining legitimacy of the regime stimulated poetic production, including the composition of much *ḥumaynī* poetry. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā's dyspeptic evaluation of the contemporary poetic scene in Yemen may show the extent to which the poetic milieu in his day differed substantially from the preexisting tradition of Imāmic panegyric.

[185] Ibid., 1:99. Al-Shawkānī protested that Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī's account of Ibrāhīm al-Yāfiʿī was unfair in *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 29. Zabārah inexplicably described it as a positive assessment. *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:5.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STATUS OF *ḤUMAYNĪ* POETRY

The Decline of Arabic Literature—Yemeni Views

Sasson Somekh, in the beginning of his erudite account of neo-classical Arabic poetry, makes the point that the corpus "does not constitute a phase of literature that can be sharply separated from its immediate ancestry."[1] However, for Somekh, this immediate ancestry was of dubious worth. According to him, the poetry written from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries "was generally dull poetry of uninspired literary quality and recondite language." It seldom served "as a means of expressing fresh human experience." It "dabbled in trifling matters" and failed to "demonstrat[e] individual poetic voice." "[T]he awareness that something was radically wrong with poetry—and with literary life as a whole—began to dawn upon authors and readers alike." Relief arrived "with the rejuvenation of cultural life in Lebanon, Egypt, and other Arab regions in the course of the last century."[2]

Somekh's characterization of five centuries of Arabic poetry as dull and trivial is not difficult to dispute. If one Shakespeare is enough to justify the study of mediocre Elizabethan playwrights, scholars should study the small number of outstanding writers in the Arab world during this period. Somekh's overall distaste for rhetorical artifice, conventionality, lack of feeling, and elitism reflects the convergent critical attitudes of both Western scholarship and such high priests of modern Arabic letters as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Muḥammad Mandūr, and Muḥammad al-Nuwayhī.

In the introduction to his biographical dictionary of poets, the polymath Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Maʿṣūm (1642–1705) writes that he chose to address "the blossoms of poetry and prose upon which the moist and

[1] *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M. Badawi. Volume 4 of *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 36.
[2] Ibid., 36–37.

cool East wind blows by [my] contemporaries and those who preceded them a little."[3] "For every age has its [great] men," he continues,

> and every racehorse has its stadium so it is not reprehensibly innovative that one of the later ones should stand out in splendid rhetoric and [launch] its sea-cleaving ark on the roiling seas of virtue. A poem:
>
> Say to him who thinks his contemporary has nothing [of value], who thinks the Ancients take precedence,
> That old [one] was once new and this new thing will become old!
>
> Though [our] time is late, posteriority does not preclude quality, for rain comes after thunder and a gift after a promise and the rank of numbers increases with their lateness.[4]

It seems that Ibn Maʿṣūm, aware that some thought his was an age of literary decline, consciously rejected it. Nevertheless, quite a few roughly contemporary writers criticized the literature of their time. Such evaluations, which ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī calls a "limited innovation" (*tajdīd maḥdūd*), marked the Qāsimī period in Yemen and contributed to an atmosphere in which *ḥumaynī* poetry became a valued mode of expression in a poet's repertoire.[5] This trend may also call into question the notion that the sole or even the main impetus for literary renewal came from outside of the Arab world.

The *sayyid* Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, the author of *Nasmat al-saḥar fī man tashayyaʿa wa-shaʿar*, possessed a contrarian temperament. According to al-Ḥūthī's *Nafaḥāt al-ʿanbar*, he once served the Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad, but the Imām so resented his starstruck adulation of a delegation of foreigners that he asked him to leave.[6] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā became a Twelver Shīʿī, a militant ideological statement against the backdrop of the polarized issue of *madhhab* allegiance in Yemen. His cantankerous personality is a blessing for historians, who can learn a great deal from the acerbic comments he made about the state of literature throughout his biographical dictionary.

In a discussion of the rampant plagiarisms of one of Imām al-Mahdī Muḥammad's court poets, Ibrāhīm al-Hindī, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā pauses to

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[3] Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 6: "*lā siyyamā mā li l-muʿāṣirīna wa-man taqaddama ʿaṣrahum qalīlan, min azāhīri l-naẓmi wa l-nathri l-latī habba ʿalayhā nasīmu l-qabūli balīlan*."

[4] Ibid., 7.

[5] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 136–141.

[6] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:418.

assess the state of poetry under this Imām.[7] According to him, al-Hindī was able to pilfer the work of poets such as the Egyptian Ibn Nubātah due to

> [his having] known the people's [low level of] understanding and [the low amount of] memorization of poetry so he stretched out his arms and legs and relaxed. This is not to say that he was unable [to compose] but poetry has not had a market in Yemen since the days of the Ismaʿīlī missionaries, the clans of Zurayʿ and Sabā. They were poet-kings and they overtook [poetry] and critiqued it. Our Zaydī Imāms do not have a great interest in it except for the Imām al-Manṣūr bi llāh al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, who was a prolific extemporizer and a cool stream. However, the others tolerate artifice [and offer] no criticism, and do not prefer the good over the vile, so poetry stagnated and its market slumped. Eternity is [only] God's.[8]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī's location of a poetic Golden Age during the reign of al-Qāsim the Great is fanciful and says more about his own perception of the declining fortunes of Shiʿism and poetry than it does about Yemeni literary history. Nevertheless, this excursus provides a uniquely Yemeni version of literature's decline. Evidence of large-scale poetic production under several eighteenth-century Imāms contradicts his assertion that none of the Imāms showed any great interest in poetry. An anecdote related by al-Ḥūthī concerning the Imām al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, himself a talented poet in classical and *ḥumaynī* styles, also undermines Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā's assessment of the Imāms' lack of taste. "If a weak poem was recited in his presence," al-Ḥūthī writes, "sweat appeared on his forehead and embarassment filled his face—some of the notables concluded that this [in itself] is a sign of weak poetry."[9]

Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Habal, the militant Zaydī whom Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā considered "the most poetic of the Yemeni poets," composed the following poem, which laments the state of poetry:

> The ear of the magnanimous is deaf to poetry's call—its recitation and composition will not profit you,

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[7] He showed his lack of respect for this ruler when he added the phrase "may his rule be diminished" (*qalla khilāfatuhu*) after his name. Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:72.

[8] Ibid., 2:82–83.

[9] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 3:16: "*kāna l-mawlā muḥammadu bnu isḥāqi idhā unshida bi-ḥaḍratihi l-shiʿru l-rakīku taḥaddara l-ʿaraqu min jabīnihi wa-ẓahara l-ḥayāʾu fī wajhihi ḥattā kāna baʿḍu l-aʿyāni yajʿalu dhālika amāratan li-ḍiʿfi l-shiʿri*."

Poets, go slowly—may you have no father!—Take your time when there is no spark to kindle a panegyric,
We live in a time when the eloquent wishes he were a stutterer who said "*fafa*,"
How often you compose praise but are not given recompense, as if your panegyric [itself] spurs on refusal?
If you derived sustenance from clay and water one day you would be unable even to attain these things,
O you who desires reward, you live in a time when "noble qualities" and "augustness" are just words,
Take care not to try to win favor by appealing to the past[10]—if you look into it you will find that this is the illness,
If you want success, do not say "grandfathers and fathers of mine have been killed before you,"
The lover is held a great distance [from the Imām] but anti-Shiʿites, determinists, anthropomorphists, and Murjiʾites are brought close,
How many heretics and men who are excessive in their enmity towards ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib [are] so close to him that you would think they were relatives!
The fate of a person who is fit in his beliefs is expulsion and exile to a great distance,
If you made a request it would be said that everybody has one and if you reproached, it would be said you use foul language [and speak] slanderously,
I ask God's forgiveness, invective is not in my nature but I am a man who refuses injustice,
A king is just one who has been thrown from the saddle if he does not give the reins a little slack in his spending,
Where are the worthy kings who, if one hoping for [their favor] approached them, would always smile and pay?
One who, with abundance and satiety, would make people forget (that they had had) livers burning with hunger?
Say to the wretches, the people of poetry, "O you whose minds are fatigued unless there is wealth to be gained,
[as for] these kings, the kings of the age, does [even] one of them follow the accepted ways?
How we have praised [them] but our panegyrics have not profited us because they reward whomever they please."
O Aḥma[d, this is] the call of a miserable man with little assistance, [one whom] the lovers have betrayed and, because of the depredations of Fate,

[10] "*Tudlī bi-sābiqatin*"—al-Ḥasan al-Habal, *Dīwān al-Habal*, ed. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Shāmī (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth, 1983), 257: "the merit of precedence in *jihād* or in virtue."

> Hear the sad complaint of a notorious man who makes others notorious if announcement and raising up are still beneficial,
> What has become of rhyme that its meeting-places are empty—was poetry spoiled by vowel alteration in your time?
> Who will raise it up from its state of debasement when the repetition of words [literally "trampling"] reaches it with its lowly shoes,
> Rhyme is in a miserable and wretched state—one who owns her finds that for him all of the expanses of the earth are narrow,
> [The] craft's goods are sold for a pittance among us and its seller earns [only] poverty and wretchedness,
> Come, help one asking for help, for whom you are always the one hoped from when he is afflicted by misery and misfortune.[11]

Al-Habal levels his criticisms at the Imāms, poets, and poetry. Like Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, his accusations against the Imāms are religiously motivated. He says that they have strayed from religious norms, surrounding themselves with people who are hostile to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[12] Their payments to poets are arbitrarily decided and sporadically disbursed. Since a high level of learning is a prerequisite for the Imāmate, this point calls into question the legitimacy of Imāms who cannot distinguish good poetry from bad.

The verse, "If you want success, do not say 'grandfathers and fathers of mine have been killed before you,'" (*lā taqul in aradta l-nujḥa qad qutilat / amāmakum liya ajdādun wa-ābāʾu*) likely refers to the genre of poems recounting the suffering and martyrdom of past Shīʿī Imāms. The Imāms, al-Habal seems to say, are no longer interested in hearing about their place in a chain of Shīʿī Imāms, and their poets are unwilling to force the issue. Therefore, poets also compromise Zaydism.

Al-Habal renews the charge, already entrenched in the Arabic poetic tradition, that poets only feign admiration in their panegyrics. Al-Jāḥiẓ implicitly made this charge in a story from *Kitāb al-Bukhalāʾ*, where a patron does not follow though with his promise to pay a poet for his panegyric. Suzanne Stetkevych argues that the anecdote suggests that paying for the poem verifies its claims. A patron like the one in al-Habal's poem who wants free panegyric subverts the contractual system

[11] Al-Habal, *Dīwān al-Habal*, 257–258.

[12] Here he clearly means legal reformers like Ibn al-Amīr who found their inspiration in Sunni *ḥadīth* collections.

of panegyric production and "confirms the poet's mendacity."[13] In addition, al-Habal complains that solecisms afflict poetry as a whole.

In contrast to al-Habal's critique, which is both conventionally Zaydī and conventionally skeptical of the poet's financial incentives, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī offers a critique of poetry in Yemen that the contemporary Yemeni poet ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ calls "proto-Romantic" (*rūmāntīkiyyah mubakkirah*).[14] Al-ʿAnsī writes:

> My friend, young men are a people created from the wine of harmony,
> with the embroidery of al-Raffāʾ and the amatory verse of Mihyār, the delicacy of al-Bahāʾ and the nature of al-Sulāmī,
> Get up and halt with me at the dance floor of poetry and let us seek out the path to love,
> Like "eyes of a gazelle" and "O fawn of the *bān* tree" "won't you give me a drink?" "Circulate [the cup], my youth,"
> And take me away from speech that holds its nose up with bravery and marching,
> like "we dressed in iron and put the lance between the leg and the stirrup", "an *alif* of a straightened spear on top of a *lām*",
> Or the pious, rolling up his sleeves [or] the jurist setting rulings in order,
> Then spare me from ascending the heights of Raḍwā (I mean the rugged words),
> Like "let the two of us weep" or "O sons of my mother, raise up…" and "these stones on the hills,"
> Do we need to cry over the traces of a dwelling? Leave this to ʿUrwah b. Ḥizām,
> As long as you see the light touch of the wind when it has started blowing like the complaint of a sleepless man crazed with love,
> And gardens like young and tender (girls) that even have a slanderer [puns with "wild thyme"],
> And as if the spring rain was a lover to whom was complained separation along with love and passion,
> Rising from it with thunder, a wail, showing insides of flashing white lightning,
> As if the flowers, while weeping, covered themselves with their calyxes,
> They were ashamed, and the anemone's cheeks were reddened with bashfulness, bloodied,
> So by the beauty of the gardens, rather by love for you, O my uppermost desire, against Time,
> Do not say that the night sky has raised a red twilight in the garden,
> Mars guarded the roses and tempted the dark's stars with them,

[13] Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 183.

[14] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah fī l-yaman*, 163.

> And the Forearm [a constellation] has borrowed the hand of the Pleiades and plucked the roses from under the husk of the clouds.[15]

Al-ʿAnsī's critique of poetic convention is itself highly conventional. The sardonic glance he casts over the pre-Islamic *aṭlāl* (abandoned traces) motif calls to mind the famous lines of Abū Nuwās on this subject, as well as the various Mamlūk poets who imitated him, as ʿAbdallah al-Ḥibshī has shown.[16] The poem begins by naming a series of poets who together make up "youths," namely Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sarī al-Mawṣilī "al-Raffā," Mihyār (whether this is Mihyār al-Daylamī or Mihyār al-Dimashqī is unclear),[17] al-Bahāʾ Zuhayr, and Muḥammad b. ʿUbayd Allāh al-Sulāmī.[18] The speaker of the poem goes on to express his boredom with various lyrical niceties before moving on to a tired dismissal of war poetry, pious and sentimental poetry, versified legal writing, and the *aṭlāl*.

The poem offers an appealing alternative to these genres of poetry in the garden poem (*rawḍiyyah*) section that follows. Zabārah seems to have sensed an affinity between this poem criticizing poetry and an anecdote on the poet's life from al-Ḥūthī's *Nafaḥāt al-ʿanbar*, which he placed directly before it. It reads:

> [al-ʿAnsī] had an irascible personality and it is said that he had a *jinnī* familiar. When his chest was compressed by the antagonism of the louts among his flock in al-Ḥaymah [he was a *qāḍī* there] he ascended to mountains that none of them could reach. Indeed, not even a thief could travel [that path]! Yet he climbed it, unperturbed by the roughness of the trail. He ascended it, wearing shoes, in his hand everything he needed for sitting [and working] (a jug of water, a book to study, ink, paper, and the like).[19]

Al-Shawkānī states that the biographical work *Ṭīb al-samar fī awqāt al-saḥar* was made into *sajʿ* "as in the work of most of the late historians" (*musajjaʿah kamā huwa ṣanʿu ghālibi l-muʾarrikhīna l-mutaʾakhkhirīna*).[20] In the preface to his biographical dictionary, *Nafaḥāt al-ʿanbar*, Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥūthī criticizes the dominant prose style of his era:

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[15] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 137; al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 477–478; Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:252–253; Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Dhawb al-dhahab*, 80.

[16] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 136–137; Th. Emil Homerin, "Reflections on Arabic Poetry in the Mamluk Age," in *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997):66.

[17] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 477n2.

[18] Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib, *Dhawb al-dhahab*, 81–87.

[19] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:252.

[20] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 118.

> Verily, their expressions do not help determine the man and knowledge of his times or the apprehension of who he really was. It benefits the imaginative faculty in the soul. Its effect is that of grasping or spreading out in the manner of poetic analogies and imaginative metaphors.[21]

"They" refers to such writers as al-Khafājī, al-Muḥibbī, and the numerous Yemenis like the author of *Ṭīb al-samar* who not only imitated their style, but also sought to surpass it. Al-Ḥūthī's criticism posits an essential difference between a writing style that is appropriate to historical research and one that is suited to stimulating the imagination. Perhaps more striking than his criticism of ornate prose in historical writing is the fact that he views the blocks of *sajʿ* that distinguished the works as performing their own legitimate function. His comments suggest that, as "poetic analogies" (*qiyāsāt shiʿriyyah*), *sajʿ* could help a reader achieve certain unidentified insights.

The *adīb* Yaḥyā b. al-Muṭahhar (d. 1850/1851), whose meeting room, dubbed "Samarqand," was one of the premier literary gatherings of Ṣanʿāʾ, commented on the Khalīlian metrical system in his *al-Aslāk al-luʾluʾiyyah fī l-shiʿr al-yaḥyawiyyah*. Here, he quotes a verse by Ibn al-Ḥajjāj: "Foot, foot, foot, this is excessive meddling, by my life. Humankind had fine poetry until al-Khalīl [b. Aḥmad] was created" (*mustafʿilun fāʿilun faʿūlun / hādhā la-ʿamrī huwa l-fuḍūlu, qad kāna shiʿru l-warā ṣaḥīḥan / min qabli an yukhlaqa l-khalīlu*).[22] Yaḥyā, who commented on the verse, concludes that "the truth is that meter is of little benefit and has few firm boundaries."[23] "Referring to these meters (that is the meters of al-Khalīl) does not mean that what deviates from them is not poetry. It is indeed poetry and deviation from them has happened to more than one of the stallion poets."[24] Yaḥyā b. al-Muṭahhar's carefree attitude towards Khalīlian meter constituted, according to al-Ḥibshī, a "theoretical revolution" (*thawrah naẓariyyah*) that was not applied much in practice.[25]

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[21] Quoted in al-Ḥibshī's introduction to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaymī al-Kawkabānī, *Ṭīb al-samar fī awqāt al-saḥar*, 7: "*innamā lā tufīdu ʿibārātuhum tashkhīṣa l-rajuli wa-lā maʿrifata aḥwālihi wa-lā iṭṭilāʿa ʿalā kunhi ḥaqīqatihi wa-innamā tufīdu takhyīlan fī l-nafsi wa-taʾthīrahā bi-qabḍin aw basṭin ʿalā namṭi l-qiyāsāt al-shiʿriyyati wa l-qaḍāyā al-takhyīliyyati*."

[22] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 144.

[23] Ibid., 144: "*Wa l-ḥaqqu anna l-arūḍa min nazri l-fāʾidati, qalīlu l-ḥudūdi*."

[24] Ibid., 144.

[25] Ibid., 144–145.

Despite the fact that the sources do not draw the connection explicitly, these scattered critical comments illuminate the literary climate in which *ḥumaynī* poetry flourished. With major exceptions, its eschewal of panegyric can be viewed as an analogue to the skepticism towards praise poetry that al-Ḥasān b. ʿAlī al-Habal expressed. Its sentimental focus on the individual and use of nature imagery calls to mind ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī's critical stance. Its simple language may react against the ornate flourishes of contemporary classical poetry. Lastly, Yaḥyā b. al-Muṭahhar's skepticism towards meter may find expression in its lack of strict adherence to metrical norms.

Hazl

Hazl, which is best translated as "jesting," sits in opposition to *jidd*, or "seriousness."[26] As Pierre Cachia shows, Arab writers use this opposition to explain the phenomenon of diglossia. The best example of this is an elegy that Ibn Sūdūn, an Egyptian, wrote about his mother. Although the topic was weighty, he wrote this poem in the colloquial, and placed it in the the *hazl* section of his *dīwān*. The classical sources that van Gelder surveyed provide some support for the association between *hazl* as humor and *hazl* as vernacular Arabic. In *al-Bayān wa l-tabyīn*, al-Jāḥiẓ concludes that the language of the *hoi polloi*, while otherwise unusable, may have a place in humor, saying "silly diction befits silly ideas" (*sakhīf al-alfāẓi mushākilun li-sakhīf al-maʿānī*).[27] He writes in the *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* that funny stories about half-breeds (*muwalladūn*) benefit from solecisms (*laḥn*).[28]

In his *Minhāj al-bulaghāʾ wa-sirāj al-udabāʾ*, Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī (d. 1285) writes:

> It is a characteristic of the serious mode that low and post-classical words are to be avoided in it, and that one restricts oneself to what is pure Arabic and to the unadulterated word-formations that are current

[26] "*Hazl* is a concept with fuzzy edges, and any attempt to define it is doomed to fail" writes G.J. van Gelder, "Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature," in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23 (1992): 86.

[27] ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, n.d.), 1:145, van Gelder, "Jest and Earnest," 103.

[28] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (Egypt: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.) 1:282; van Gelder, "Jest and Earnest," 86.

> in their [scil. the true Arabs'] speech. One should not swerve from this towards what does not enter their speech, apart from those barbarous and unusual words found in it occasionally, which are considered weak and are [merely] tolerated.[29]

Poetry that mixed *jidd* and *hazl* became a popular genre in Yemen during the eighteenth century.[30] Describing the genre as a mixture of seriousness and humor is somewhat misleading because the introduction of humor made these compositions humorous throughout. "The division into *jidd* and *hazl* is not a symmetrical one," van Gelder notes. "*Hazl* often plays the part of a parasite on *jidd*, by employing and exploiting it and turning it into itself; but the reverse process does not occur."[31]

Al-Ḥibshī identifies Muḥammad b. Hāshim al-Shāmī and Saʿīd b. ʿAlī al-Qarawānī—both of whom were affiliated with ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī's Safīnah Circle—as the men who invented this genre.[32] As van Gelder's research shows, the mixing of *jidd* and *hazl* has a long history in Arabic literature. Yet the opposition between *jidd* and *hazl* did not only represent the opposition between serious and humorous themes. As al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Qarṭājannī hint, *hazl* possessed a strong linguistic element.

The *qāḍī* Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥajrī (1890–1960) viewed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Yemeni writers' mixture of *jidd* and *hazl* as an innovation. Describing the poetry of al-Qarawānī and al-Shāmī, he says: "They mixed classical (*ḥakamī*) poetry and solecistic *ḥumaynī* poetry in [their poem], making the *ḥakamī jidd* and the *ḥumaynī hazl*—this was a wonderful and innovative technique."[33] Zabārah concurs, saying that their poem was "a great piece of rhetoric" (*badīʿah jayyidah*) and a type of writing that "none in Yemen other than them

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[29] Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī, *Minhāj al-bulaghāʾ wa-sirāj al-udabāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb b. Khūja (Tunis: Dār al-kutub al-sharqiyah, 1966), 328, trans. van Gelder, "Jest and Earnest," 183.

[30] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 140–141.

[31] van Gelder, "Jest and Earnest," 85.

[32] Al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 140.

[33] Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 2:525: "*Wa-mazajāhā bi l-shiʿri l-ḥakamiyi wa l-shiʿri l-ḥumayniyi l-malḥūni wa-jaʿalā l-ḥakamiyya jiddiyan wa l-ḥumayniyyata hazaliyan wa-hiya ṭariqatun mubtakiratun ẓarīfatun*." The original source for the poem is al-Jaḥḥāf's *Durar nuḥūr al-ḥūr al-ʿīn*. It is also quoted in Zabārah's *Nashr al-ʿarf* and, according to J.A. Dafari ("Ḥumaini poetry," 114) is appended to al-Qārrah's *ḥumaynī dīwān*. Muhsin b. ʿAbd al-Karim wrote a *muʿāradah* of the poem (Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:282–285; Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 2:308, al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 141).

had ever done before" (*lam yasbuqhumā bi l-yamani ghayruhumā ilā mithlihā*).[34]

ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Amīr, who disseminated his political views through *ḥumaynī* poetry while in prison (pp. 103–104), wrote a poem that combines *jidd* and *hazl* and exemplifies the contemporary understanding of the opposition between the two. This poem, which casts aspersions on the addressee's home town, responds to an attack on the Friday mosque of al-Rawḍah. Describing the Friday mosque of Shibām in unflattering terms, the poem is a species of *takhmīs*, alternating between two verses of classical poetry (*jidd*) and four verses of *ḥumaynī* poetry (*hazl*):

> The hand of Fate has brushed off the designs on the ceilings like a wing,
> [like] one who is not rich by any means paying off a debt,
> The hand of decay has effaced the traces of the campsite and an army of owls [has built] nest after nest there.
>
> *[It wears] a necklace of balled-up porcupines*
> *And the forest dove clucks eloquently, The Alfī* [Ulufī?] *minaret is short and twisted,*
> *And its smashed parapets of black stone deserve pity.*
>
> Horsemen of Jonah's folk (puns on "pillars") were there—if any crookedness arose in it, they were the first in line,
> The armies of insects dressed it in red garments, making one think it was gold filigree.
>
> *If you saw the bedbugs you would think they were vultures* [due to their size and numbers]
> *And the blood* [of their victims] *would seethe like a boiling pot,*
> *Some of them are restless and some of them chew,*
> *Some of them greet you "in advance" at your sleeping bag.*

This poem uses the pre-Islamic motif of the deserted traces of a campsite (*aṭlāl*) to ridicule the mosque. The contrast between the stately diction of the classical lines and the short lines of homely *ḥumaynī* verse operates primarily on the level of linguistic heteroglossia. That is, the *ḥumaynī* lines abut the classical lines to amplify their humor. For example, "insects" sets the stage for an extended description of bedbugs. The poem's registers of language vary considerably, from references to cooking ("like a boiling pot"), to livestock ("some of them are restless

[34] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:276.

and some of them chew"), to the bathhouse ("some of them greet you 'in advance').[35]

The poem goes on to describe the darkness of the mosque and the mediocrity of its congregation and staff:

> It is as if the dark at noon in her lofty towers—were an army of black men who never travel by day or by night,
> The shortness of the day in Bulgar-land has been transferred to it so you can not distinguish evening from noon,
>
> *How many men with kuḥl on their eyes have knocked their foreheads into the wall,*[36]
> *Does the blind man's groping with his cane even help?*
> *How wonderful it is when the preacher lights his candle,*
> *Were one to extinguish it you would hear a thousand shouts.*
>
> The historians claim that its light has been stored away since the 200s,
> The heads of the community prostrate themselves as if the darkness had poured them glasses of wine,
>
> *The qāḍī lost his shoe and his coat,*
> *Everyone who leaves [the mosque] has [only] a little in their heads,*
> *[Many] stand expectantly by the preacher, waiting to shake his hand,*
> *But I never saw him do anything important worth clamoring over.*

The following section contrasts the representatives of ancient wisdom and valor with local Yemeni tribes:

> If the Greeks were around at this event, Aristotle and Plato would have died from fright,
> If ʿAntar the ʿAbsite was among them his strength would have betrayed him and he would no longer have been satisfied with his sorrel and roan horses.
>
> *What would the Qawsite do, or the ʿIkāmite?*
> *What would al-Shāyif do, after girding his loins for battle?*[37]
> *He takes his horse and heads for Madām,*[38]
> *And the sword, in the hands of the courageous, remains broken, a spoon.*

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[35] "In advance" (*tasbiqah*) is the greeting one receives on entering a bathhouse.

[36] *Kuḥl* is believed to sharpen eyesight.

[37] Z: al-Qawsī is a *shaykh* of Baraṭ, ʿIkām is a region in Baraṭ, and al-Shāyif is a *shaykh* of Bakīl.

[38] A: a village in Ibb governorate.

The poem describes the water that fills the ablutions font as extremely cold and dirty.[39] The mosque is also drafty, it provides little protection from the elements, and its well is virtually inaccessible:

> One who wants to make a detailed account of this story should consult the books of divination,
> For in them is a text that the tongues of poetry are unable to verify,
>
> *In [this spot] cold [water] runs to the ablution basins,*
> *You can see the freezing waters and ice chunks going by,*
> *This is the truth and the eye can be a witness,*
> *It is full of filth to a man's height, algae and frogs.*
>
> Bitter cold stakes its tents in it and you can see the water taking out hair,[40]
> As if a razor was in it so he who extends his hand to it is wounded by the greenness.[41]
>
> *What good are the chandelier and the swords,*[42]
> *When the wind from Fajj al-Ashmūr*[43] *blows, tearing open the shutters,*
> *Flying down the corridor, shaking the weak ceilings,*
> *You can hear thunder and lightning that burns the fingers.*
>
> Well ropes whose connection Time has prevented—Its vicissitudes have betrayed him who would proceed quickly,
> Even if a bull drew it forth the bucket would fight against him who cast it in—its "shore" is as far away as the sea.
>
> *How many buckets have gotten lost and wandered off*?
> *How many water scoops have plopped in of their own accord*?
> *Every time the pulley brings it up it falls back down,*
> *If you are distracted from it for a moment it will still spill.*

The description of the well begins a gradual transition into a generalized attack on Shibām and the love theme. The paltry well is the place where shiftless men of the town flirt with youths:

> How many travelers from a spring pasturage have headed towards it only to be repelled by the victorious hands of Fate?

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[39] The coldness of the water in an ablutions font corresponds to laxity in fulfilling religious obligations. A Yemeni proverb, "*al-bard ʿaduww al-dīn*", encapsulates this idea. Ismāʿīl al-Akwaʿ, *al-Amthāl al-yamāniyah* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-Jīl al-jadīd, 1984), 1:273.

[40] This puns with the hair tent and "poetry" in previous *fuṣḥā* verse.

[41] "Razor" (*mūsā*), "wounded" (*kalīm*) and "greenness" (*khiḍr*) pun on the Qurʾānic story of Moses and Khiḍr (Qurʾān 18:61–62).

[42] A: Swords are used to decorate the walls of mosques.

[43] Z: Place between ʿAmrān and Kuḥlān. Proverbially cold (Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 41n1).

This is only what God has decreed and the predetermined cannot be warded off with summary judgement or cautions.

Why should we make ablutions with water when Shibām has dirt?
It is better to perform ablutions [with the dust] of the street—half of [the city] is a ruin,
There are two artesian wells but they are just a mirage,
They look to you like a gazelle but their stench betrays them […][44]

The remainder of this poem, in which the contrast between the classical and *ḥumaynī* sections seems to be muted, is lyrical in nature. Both express the same motifs. The poem seems to suggest that whereas the stark contrast between *ḥumaynī* poetry and classical *qaṣīdah* provokes ironic humor, lyric love poetry and *ḥumaynī* poetry share the same diction and ethos.

The close linkage between classical lyric poetry and *ḥumaynī* poetry is manifested thematically and orthographically in a poem combining *jidd* and *hazl* by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Fusayyil.[45] The verse, "**How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he whom he loves [in] his separation**" (*kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin / ṭāl mimman yuḥibbuhu hujrānahu* [sic]) runs vertically down the center of the page.[46] The right side of the page contains a *jidd* composition, where each verse begins with a word from the verse in the middle. The left side of the page contains a *hazl* composition, where each verse uses a word from the verse in the middle.

Jidd:

How can I not love him, O censurers, when he has appeared with his decorated cheeks?
How to console a lover, tears flowing, to whom one cannot compare driving rain?
How to console among the people a distressed lover—how his sorrows are stirred by love,
How to console in love one who conceives ecstasy for a gazelle with an orchard in his cheeks,
How to console in love the heart taken prisoner by a lover with pleasing eyes,
How to console in love the heart of a lover whose eyes are sleepless with passion,

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[44] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 27r–29r.
[45] Ibid., 129v.
[46] I have translated the poem in this painfully literal way and rendered it in bold so that it can be seen running through the finished poem.

How to console in love the heart of a lover [who] has spent a long time devoting himself to describing [the beloved],
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away—from his aggrieved heart a violent love [emanates],
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he who[se] boredom is hidden,
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he whom he loves, his orchard [untended],
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he whom he loves [in] his separation.

Hazl:

How can I not shun the censurer and defy him, when his delirious raving about love is true?
How to console one whose heart is in the possession of a lover whose beauty radiates solace,
How to console among the lovers is a wounded one whose teeth have been pulled,
How to console in a love that makes [him] lose his mind, his madness setting out for the hillocks of passion,
How to console in love a heart that is delicate after love has pierced its ears [with abasement],
How to console in love the heart of a lover [who fell in love] after love's fatigue,
How to console in love the heart of a lover [who] has spent a long time with love breaking his pots,
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from a lover whose body is gold,
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he who[se] whose rebellion is fealty,
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he whom he loves [in] his giddiness,
How to console in love the heart of a lover, [who] has spent a long time away from he whom he loves [in] his separation.

Hazl (left side)

Kayfa lā ahjuru l-ʿadhūla wa- aʿṣīhi wa-qad ṣaḥḥa fī l-hawā hadhayānuh,
Kayfa yaslū man qalbihi ʿinda khillin qad maḍā fī jamālihi salwānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ʿāshiqīna kalīmun baʿda mā qad taqallaʿat asnānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi ḍāʾiʿu ʿaqlin jadda fī nabjati ***l-gharāmi*** *jinānuh*,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu raqīqin baʿda mā ***naqaba*** *al-hawā idhānah*,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin baʿda mā kāna fī l-hawā ***burmānuh***,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mā kasara al-hawā shiqfānah,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla min ghuṣni qaddihi tibyānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman yaṭīhi ʿiṣyānuh,

Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman yuḥibbuhu maydānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman yuḥibbuhu hujrānuh.

Jidd (right side)

Kayfa lā aʿshiqu al-ʿadhūla wa-qad lāḥa wa-minhu tazayyanat awjānuh,
Kayfa yaslū ṣabban yaṣubbu dumūʿan mā ḥakāhā mina l-ḥayā hatānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-nāsi ṣabbun ʿamīdun fī l-hawā kam taḥarrakat ashjānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi man hāma wijdan fī ghazālin fī khaddihi bustānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbun sabathu min ḥabībin mumannaʿu aʿyānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin saharat fī gharāmihi ajfānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla fī waṣfi ḥālihi amʿānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla min qalbihi al-shajiyi hayamānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman mulūluhu kitmānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman yuḥibbuhu bustānuh,
Kayfa yaslū fī l-ḥubbi qalbu muḥibbin ṭāla mimman yuḥibbuhu hujrānuh.

The three phrases indicated in bold ("*taqallaʿat*"—pulled [teeth], "*naqab*"—piercing [ears], "*shiqfanah*"—potsherds) are the only colloquialisms. These bits of dialect exaggerate to humorous effect the already hyperbolic statements concerning the pain of love. The poem as a whole seems to show the intimate relationship between classical *ghazal* and *ḥumaynī* poetry rather than their contrast.

The idea of *ḥumaynī* poetry as a protest against the classical *qaṣīdah*, an alternative poetics, is not without merit. The emphasis on linguistic register in *jidd* and *hazl* partly explains how *ḥumaynī* poetry separated itself from other kinds of poetry, developed its own distinctive features, and—in the case of the Safinah Circle—showed a contrarian spirit. In Yemen as in the Spanish *zajal, hazl* served as a simultaneously thematic and linguistic category, in which each facet reinforced the other.

Yemeni poets responded to the connection between dialect and humor in two ways. Most minimized the differences between classical Arabic poetry (particularly lyric poetry) and *ḥumaynī* poetry. The editor of Jaḥḥāf's *dīwān* highlights these differences when he describes the paradox of "gilded and pure poetry whose solecisms are its case inflection and whose mistakes are its correctness."[47] The Imām al-Wāthiq bi llāh al-Muṭahhar b. Muḥammad, one of the two earliest *ḥumaynī* poets whose work has survived, explains that *ḥumaynī* poetry "is written in a style more intimately associated with euphony and elegance," while

[47] Al-Jaḥḥāf, *Dīwān*, 1v: "*al-naẓm al-mudhdhahab al-munaqqaḥ alladhī laḥnuhu iʿrābuhu wa-khaṭāhu ṣawābuhu*."

classical poetry (which he calls "*ʿarabī*") "is more beautiful in its dignified diction and its serious and exalted themes."[48] In the eighteenth century, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī describes the poet Ḥaydar Āghā b. Muḥammad al-Rūmī as having written in "the two arts" (*al-fannayn*), *muwashshaḥ* and "*aʿrabiyyah*."[49] Muḥammad Zabārah also uses this terminology.[50]

Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī underscores the normative poetics of *ḥumaynī* poetry in a poem sent to his son Aḥmad, who also wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry:

> Be gentle, O composer of *ḥumaynī* poetry, with the bloody and painful wound of love,
> You did not examine what the reciter [of the poem], standing, did to me (but Your Lord is omniscient),
> [By renewing] my miseries, the intensity of my passion, and my flowing tears.
> How much poetry [you write] and how many flowing tears flow and what [will become] of the smitten heart?
> Hearing it causes the [tears on the] cheeks [to fall], the passion to grow, and what was repaired to be broken [again].
> It saddens the carefree and disturbs the troubled lover who vies [for favor] and it disquiets the caged bird,
> From which rock do you draw the gold of this speech that you mint?
> How do you engrave these metal ornaments with a beautiful pattern and unique manufacture?
> Do you sieze magic or assemble the hearts of men, putting them all on a string?
> You make the soul happy and dress the *shaykh* in the garment of youth, enchanting the listener.
> Peace be upon you, composer of *ḥumaynī* poetry, and upon those who hear it.[51]

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī's poem depicts *ḥumaynī* poetry as a craft analogous to that of the jeweler. For him, *ḥumaynī* poetry's distinguishing feature is its lyricism rather than its use of the vernacular. Its raw materials are the emotions of the smitten. As Dafari explains, the main themes of *ḥumaynī* poetry are love and the misery caused by unrequited love.[52] *Ḥumaynī* poetry acts by amplifying sentiment.

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[48] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 16.
[49] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:75.
[50] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:234; 2:246.
[51] Al-Ānisī, *Tarjīʿ al-aṭyār*, 207–208; Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 382.
[52] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 238.

Most poets of the period in question who wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry—many of whom also wrote classical poetry—followed this trajectory in *ḥumaynī* poetics. Their lyric *ḥumaynī* compositions follow much the same poetic framework that their classical lyric poems followed, though without any of the avowedly "fictional" formulations some made about medieval *ghazal*.[53] The two traits that authors most often point to as distinguishing fine *ḥumaynī* poetry are "*riqqah*" (delicacy) and "*insijām*" (harmony).[54] Less often, these authors use terms such as "*jazālah*" (purity) or derivatives of "*luṭf*" (tenderness).[55] If poets' turn to *ḥumaynī* was at all rebellious, it could have been a result of the discontent with the poetic climate, such as al-Habal's cynicism towards panegyric, or al-ʿAnsī's proto-Romanticism.

Composition and Collection

Unfortunately, no *ars poetica* of *ḥumaynī* poetry comparable to Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk's *Dār al-ṭirāz* is extant, and the little information on the composition of this poetry lies scattered in editorial remarks in *ḥumaynī* poetry collections. These occasional statements shed a little light on the composition process, but they do not provide a complete picture. In the *dīwān* of Ismāʿīl al-Fāyiʿ, the redactor judges that a poet who omitted the *taqfīl* in his *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥ* "does not know the rules of *ḥumaynī*" (*ghayr ʿārif qawāʿid al-ḥumaynī*).[56] But what were the "rules of *ḥumaynī*"? This particular redactor says more than most on the subject. He makes clear that *ḥumaynī* poetry used classical ("*ḥakamī*") meters, a point disputed by Muḥammad al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī in his *Tāj al-ʿarūs*.[57] Despite the patchwork nature of his statements, two things are clear: the composition of *ḥumaynī* poetry was inextricably bound to musical concerns, and composing *ḥumaynī* poetry was a process that drew upon its own body of orally-transmitted knowledge.

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[53] See Rina Drory, "Three Attempts to Legitimize Fction in Classical Arabic Literature," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 159–161.

[54] Yūsuf b. ʿAlī al-Kawkabānī, *Ṭawq al-ṣādiḥ al-mufaṣṣal bi-jawāhir al-bayān al-wāḍiḥ* (MS Western Mosque Library, *adab* 110) 121v; Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 185, 193, 194; al-Fāyiʿ, *Azāhir al-muḥayyāʾ*, 2v, 16v–18v, 26r-v, 27v, 74v, 84v.

[55] Al-Fāyiʿ, *Azāhir al-muḥayyāʾ*, 14r, 84v.

[56] Ibid., 79r.

[57] Ibid., 74r; and p. 312.

> [al-Ḍiyāʾ al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā] wrote this *ḥumaynī qaṣīdah* in praise of [Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Fāyiʿ] and he had the following speech to make about the poet: "The *qaṣīdah* of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī has eight metrical feet. It begins, 'The one who charms me has put on a [word unclear] encrusted with jewels.'" I found its line too long to sing and it was bulky. The knowledgeable masters of this craft informed me [about this] so I set out to write [the following poem] and I delved into the melodies of men and of women, and consulted my companions, asking them how to conceal what was bad of rhyme-letters, to accept what was pleasing, to improve it with the best appropriate *sajʿ* and rhythms.[58]

A chronology of composition emerges from this anecdote. Poets select a melodic scheme, choose a rhyme scheme, and develop the wording (*sajʿ*) and rhythms. On the last step, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī remarks that the poet Ḥaydar Āghā was known for using "embellishments" (*muḥassināt*) in his *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥāt*.[59]

From another statement in Ismāʿīl al-Fāyiʿ's *dīwān*, it seems that the *abyāt* of one poem were used as the basis for the *tawshīḥ* and *taqfīl* of another: "After I had examined and recorded the *qaṣīdah* (which was intended as a panegyrical greeting to the Imām al-Mahdī) and the fortified structures that made up its palaces (*buyūt quṣūrihā mushayyadah*), it occurred to me that this meter (lit. "sea") could be entered by the *tawshīḥ* and *taqfīl*."[60]

These poems were not always interpreted accurately. In a poem by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī in a collection of *ḥumaynī* poetry, the copyist made a mistake by writing both "*tawshīḥ*" and "*takhmīs*" around the interpolated verses.[61] This mistake illustrates the correlation between the two genres of poetry. *Ḥumaynī muwashshaḥāt* contained lines from

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[58] Ibid., 84v: *wa-lahu* [al-Ḍiyāʾ al-sayyid al-Murtaḍā] *fī madḥihi hādhihi l-qaṣīdatu min al-ḥumaynīyi wa-fīhā min al-nāẓimi hādhihi l-khuṭbati: ammā baʿdu fa-inna qaṣīdata sayyidī ḥusayn bni ʿaliyyi muthamminatu wa-awwaluhā "qad labas fātinī qāʾid mukallal bi-jawhar" wa-raʾaytu nafasahā yaṣʿabu fī l-alḥāni jasīman. Akhbaranī bihi arbābu hādhihi l-ṣināʿati min dhawī l-ʿirfāni fa-tajāsartu mustahdifan ʿalā naẓmi hādhā fa-wāqaftu alḥāna l-rijāli wa l-niswāni wa-ṭalabtu min al-ikhwāni mā wajabat ʿalayhim min* (85r) *sitri mā shāna fī qawāfīhā wa-qubūl mā zāna wa-taḥsīnihā ʿalāʾ aḥsani mā yaṣluḥu lahā min al-sajʿi wa l-awzāni.*

[59] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 2:82.

[60] Al-Fāyiʿ, *Azāhir al-muḥayyāʾ*, 77v: "*wa-lammā iṭṭalaʿtu wa-raqamtu l-qaṣīdata l-latī mina l-mamdūḥi fī tahniyati l-imāmi l-mahdiyyi wa-buyūt quṣūrihā mushayyadah wa-nabbahtu anna hādhā l-baḥr yadkhuluhu l-taqfīlu wa l-tawshīḥu.*"

[61] *Safīnah* (BL OIOC 3970), 125v.

other poems or were written in imitation of other poems (*muʿāraḍah*).[62] According to ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh b. Sharaf al-Dīn, musicians caused problems when they performed *ḥumaynī* poetry. ʿĪsā collected Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn's poetry from written sources. He observed with opprobrium that the notes of a wedding singer in Ṣanʿāʾ, Aḥmad al-Shaykh, contained a poem by Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah to which the musician had given a new ending.[63] Another musician attempted to facilitate plagiarism of the poet's corpus.[64]

This last anecdote illustrates the variety of ways in which *ḥumaynī* poetry was preserved. The fact that poets like Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah Sharaf al-Dīn, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā al-Ānisī possessed *ḥumaynī dīwān*s in addition to *dīwān*s of classical verse—with the accompanying commitments of time, money, and preservation—distinguishes the *ḥumaynī* corpus from traditions of Arabic popular and semi-popular poetry outside of Yemen. Though their contents are in non-standard Arabic, these manuscripts boast beautiful calligraphy and illuminations. While composition probably involved some spontaneity, it seems clear that authors purposefully wrote down a large proportion of the *ḥumaynī* corpus.

While the very existence of *ḥumaynī dīwān*s proves the high status of the genre, other factors qualify this conclusion. For example, the bulky copy of the *dīwān* of Aḥmad al-Ānisī at the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ does not contain any *ḥumaynī* poetry. The copy of the same poet's *dīwān* housed at the British Library contains a substantial amount in a section at the end of the *dīwān*. Similarly, one of the two copies of Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf's *dīwān* in Ṣanʿāʾ lacks *ḥumaynī* poetry altogether, while the copy at the Vatican has a substantial section. Thus, it appears that *ḥumaynī* poetry did not enjoy the same esteem as classical poetry. Dafari, relying on his position as an observer of the *ḥumaynī* tradition from the inside, states that the tacit rule in Yemen is for a poet to die without having collected his poetry. If he was eminent, his relatives or admirers would collect his work in a *dīwān* and to it they may append a number of *ḥumaynī* poems.[65]

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[62] For example, the *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥ* in Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 185v incorporates lines from a poem by Bashshār b. Burd.

[63] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 290.

[64] Ibid., 226–227.

[65] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 25, 37–38n61. Dafari says that Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. 1825/1826) prefaced his father Muḥammad's (d. 1753/1754) *dīwān* by saying that most of his *ḥumaynī* poetry was not preserved. Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 108n113.

The "*safīnah*" (pl. *safāyin*) was another characteristic place where *ḥumaynī* poetry was recorded.[66] Dafari's observations about the form bear repeating:

> A *safīnah* is generally a random collection of poetry owned by individuals who copy different poems either from books or *dīwān*s or as they hear them from singers and composers. They tend to have errors, no organization and a tendency to attribute poems to prominent *washshāḥīn*.[67]

Inspiration

Medieval Arab poets and critics were largely unconcerned with the issue of poetic inspiration.[68] The ancient belief that poets possessed *jinnī* familiars was likely abandoned soon after the rise of Islam.[69] ʿAbbasid literati rationalized the *jinn* of pre-Islamic poetry. Al-Ḥārith b. al-Ḥilliza's *muʿallaqah* contains the line, "An ʿIramite like one the *jinn* uncovered / his appearance burning up his opponents." According to Abū Zakariyā al-Tibrīzī, "*jinn*" in this verse means "the most clever and heroic people." The commentator Abū Bakr al-Anbarī quotes this interpretation alone in his discussion of the line.[70] In his *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/9) discusses the verse, "We made the dogs of the tribe (*kilābu l-ḥayyi*) whimper", saying, "It is related as 'the dogs of the *jinn*' (*kilābu l-jinni*)." He goes on to explain that "one who was very brave was compared to a *jinn*."[71] He notes in a different

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[66] Both Dafari ("Ḥumaini Poetry," 37n60) and Ghānim (*Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 25) write that the word *safīnah* first appears in Thaʿlabī's *Yatīmat al-dahr*. This is not the case.

[67] Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 25.

[68] Gustave von Grunebaum, "The Aesthetic Foundation of Arabic Literature," in *Comparative Literature* 4 (1952): 325n5; Wolfhart Heinrichs, "The Meaning of Mutanabbî," in *Poetry and Prophecy*, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 121; Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und griechische Poetik* (Beirut/Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1969), 32. One notable exception to this rule of thumb was Abū ʿĀmir b. Shuhayd's *Risālat al-tawābiʿ wa l-zawābiʿ*.

[69] See Fritz Meier, "Some Aspects of Inspiration by Demons in Islam," in *The Dream and Human Societies*, ed. Roger Callois and Gustave von Grunebaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 424–429; Philip Kennedy, "Some Demon Muse: Structure and Allusion in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāma Iblīsiyya*," in *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 2.1 (1999): 117–37.

[70] Abū Zakariyā Yaḥyā al-Ṭibrīzī, *A Commentary on Ten Ancient Arabic Poems*, ed. Charles Lyall, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1894), 139; Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Anbarī, *Sharḥ al-qaṣāʾid al-sabʿ al-ṭiwāl al-jāhiliyāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, (Cairo, 1963), 493.

[71] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, 6:113.

place that the masses (*al-ʿāmma*) refer to poets as the dogs of the *jinn*.[72] Al-Jāḥiẓ adopts a skeptical position, attributing belief in *jinn* to the masses and the Bedouin (*al-aʿrāb*). He explains the appearance of the *jinn* in a naturalistic way:

> If a man is by himself and stands still, a small matter seems large, his thoughts break up, his calm is shattered, and he sees what is not visible and hears what is not audible, imagining that a small insignificant thing is a great and exalted one. Then they [the Bedouin] turn whatever [such a person] imagined into poetry that they recite and tales that they pass on to their descendents, [this transmission] making them more believable. People grow up on them. A child grows up on them and then when he is in the middle of the desert and the blackness of night descends, at the first strange feeling or fright or an owl's hoot or an echo, he actually sees every deceit and fancies every falsehood. Sometimes it is in the nature of man and in his natural disposition to be a prolific liar, a patron of calumny and of gross hyperbole, and to recite poetry that reflects this characteristic. In this way he can say "I saw ghouls" or "I spoke with incubi!" He [may] go even farther, saying "I killed one" or even further than that by saying "I befriended one" or even further than that to the point where he might say "I married one!"[73]

The idea that a dream or mystical trance could inspire poetry also finds little support in the mainstream of medieval Arabic literature. The *Kitāb al-aghānī* contains at least one account of a poet, ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ, who became a poet as the result of a dream.[74]

The *ḥumaynī* tradition, in contrast to the literary tradition as a whole, abounds with accounts of *jinn* familiars and oneiric encounters with *ḥumaynī* poets of ages past. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī (d. 1465/1466), a Sufi *ḥumaynī* poet, reports that in one of his dreams, Ibn al-ʿArabī himself gave him a *ḥumaynī* poem.[75] A nineteenth-century Yemeni source written by a pro-Sufi Zaydī reports that ʿUmar b. al-Fāriḍ visited the collector of his *dīwān* in a dream to remind him of a poem he had forgotten.[76] The *ḥumaynī* poet of the Rasūlid period ʿAbdallah al-Mazzāḥ, began reciting poetry only after being spoken to by an anonymous figure in a dream. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn began composing *ḥumaynī* poetry only after being visited in a

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[72] Ibid., 6:229.
[73] Ibid., 6:250–251.
[74] Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfaḥānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, n.d.), 22:81–82.
[75] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī, *Dīwān* (BL OIOC 3789), 113v.
[76] Muḥsin b. Isḥāq, *Dhawb al-ʿasjad*, 11v.

dream by al-Mazzāḥ.[77] In the eighteenth century, the Zaydī Imām and *ḥumaynī* poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm was visited by the same al-Mazzāḥ in a dream.[78]

The idea of poetic inspiration in dreams or in ecstatic states arose first among Sufis and survived *ḥumaynī* poetry's transition to the world of the Zaydī courtiers. In the case of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn and Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, one finds dreams used in order to legitimate a poetic tradition. They also seem to bolster the proto-Romantic ethos and appeal to *ḥumaynī* poets' authentic and unaffected sentiment. Many *ḥumaynī* poets experienced ecstatic states. The Sufi *ḥumaynī* poet al-Sūdī wrote his poems on the walls with charcoal during mystical trances.[79] Dafari judged the Sufi *ḥumaynī* poet Ḥātim al-Ahdal to have been unique in the *ḥumaynī* tradition for his "wild mystic utterances." His poems, like al-Sūdī's, were collected by his students.[80]

All of the "crazed gentlemen" (*ẓurafāʾ al-majānīn*) had dealings with the *jinn*, but this phenomenon was not limited to marginal poets. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī was said to have had a *jinnī* familiar.[81] Luṭf Allāh al-Jaḥḥāf said that the *qāḍī* and poet Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qāṭin, who administered Ṣanʿā"s *awqāf* for the Imām al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbās, became so engrossed with Sufism that he began to see *jinn* while attending the Imām at court.[82] Al-Jaḥḥāf also reported that the *shayṭān* the musician Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbdallah al-Ṭall claimed was inhabiting him was Jewish and that the poet himself practiced Judaism.[83] He

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[77] Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, 196–197.

[78] Muḥsin b. Isḥāq, *Dhawb al-ʿasjad*, 11v.

[79] The chronicler ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs wrote: "[al-Sūdī] wrote his poems on the walls with charcoal and if he regained consciousness he erased what he had written. When his disciples learned of this they rushed to write down the poetry of his that they found on the walls and joined them together." *Taʾrīkh al-nūr al-sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub, 1985), 143.

[80] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 68, 96n69. The Leiden MS catalogs list one copy of Ḥātim al-Ahdal's *dīwān*: Or. 2771. They designate the manuscript described by al-Dafari as Ḥātim's *dīwān* as an anonymous collection. Petrus Voorhoeve, *Handlist of Arabic manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and other collections in the Netherlands* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1980), 62, 65; Leiden University Library, *Catalogus Codicum Arabicorum Bibliothecae Academiae lugduno-batavae* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1888–1907), 749, 752.

[81] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:252.

[82] Ibid., 1:279.

[83] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:285. The poet's Judaism seems highly unlikely. Regarding non-Muslim *jinn*, in 2000 I heard from a friend that a traditional healer in Ṣaʿdah

performed throughout Yemen, establishing a family in each place he went and giving his children two names, one of his own devising and one suggested by his *jinnī*.[84]

Rural *qaṣāʾid* often refer to supernatural sources of inspiration, confirming al-Jāḥiẓ's suspicions that rural populations continued to believe in *jinnī* familiars. References to a poet's "*hājis*"[85]—or, less often, to their "*ḥalīlah*"—typically occur in the beginning of such poems.[86] According to an informant of Dafari's, Shaykh ʿAbdallah al-Bayḥānī of Aden, the *hājis* is an unreliable, whimsical spirit who visits at night and in desolate places. She may intentionally embarrass the poet in front of other poets.[87] According to Dafari, the following premodern poets were thought to have enjoyed particularly congenial relations with their *hājis*es: al-Shubatī, Abū Muṭlaq, al-Qushabī, Ibn Sunbul, Yaḥyā ʿUmar, and al-Ḥumayd b. Manṣūr.[88]

According to the *Lisān al-ʿarab*, "*hājis*" means "thought" (*khāṭir*). However, having assembled a substantial corpus of south Yemeni folk poetry, the Comte de Landberg reaches the conclusion that "*hājis*" should be defined as "*veine poétique, inspiration du poète*."[89] He defines other derivatives of this root differently. The poets quoted in Aḥmad b. Nāṣir al-Ḥārithī's collection of twentieth-century rural *qaṣāʾid* use these derivatives: "*hajasa*," "*hawjās*," "*hājūs*," "*hawājīs*," "*hawājis* (*al-shiʿr*)," "*tihjāsī*," and "(*buyūt*) *muhtajas*."[90] The semantics of the term complicate the question of whether the *hājis* was an external form or merely a term for an internal process.[91]

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diagnosed a sleepwalker as being the victim of a Buddhist *jinnī*. My friend suggested that the healer rub the man's belly to exorcise the spirit. The healer was not amused.

[84] Ibid., 1:286.

[85] The Jewish poet Sālim al-Shabazī frequently refers to his *hājis* or *hātif* (Chapter Five).

[86] Lucine Taminian, "The Power of Language: Poetry and Prophetic Knowledge in Yemen," paper presented at the Hagop Kevorkian Center, New York University, 14 February 1999, 16–17, 19–20.

[87] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 273, 298n26; Serjeant, *South Arabian Poetry*, Arabic section 10.

[88] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 273–275; Flagg Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 247, 271n15, 358–359; al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 409–412.

[89] L, 2851; see also Serjeant, *South Arabian Poetry*, 14n12.

[90] Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad al-Ḥārithī, *Shadwu l-bawādī* (Aden: Muʾassasat 13 October li l-ṣaḥāfah, 1991), 100, 339, 415, 433, 438, 440, 510, 523, 537.

[91] Dafari reached this conclusion as well. Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 274.

In al-Ḥārithī's collection many poets invoke these muses.[92] Even today, the external *hājis* (or *ḥalīlah*) plays a central role in many Bedouin poets' process of composition.[93] Typically, the speaker would begin his poem by identifying himself with his *kunyā* ("*qāl* so and so" or "*yiqūl* so and so") and describing some sort of an emotional disturbance, which usually occurs in the evening or at night. The *hājis* contributed to both the poet's woes and their cathartic expression in verse. One poet writes, "Abū Ṣāliḥ said: my heart was lightened of its "*hājūs*" and in the evening verses came to me one after the other."[94] Various Bedouin poems described their encounters with their *hājises* as follows: "O head, tonight you remember your *hājis*."[95] "The brother of Raḥmah says: I began in the afternoon when the *hājis* responded, flowing over me[96]—I began with the [problem of the] ʿAraq Ḥuḍn while the sun was setting, considering my letters and their *laḥn*."[97] "Every time I said that my heart's troubles (*hawājīs qalbī*) had gone they came back, returning upon me fifteen times a day."[98] "The brother of Ṣāliḥ says: the *hājis* came on a sleepless night, breaking his exhausted weeping with bad news."[99] "I did not know until the *hājis* and the *ḥalīlah* arrived (suffering from the injustice of the situation). I said: 'O my *hājis*, Baqʿāʾ Ṭawīlah is still bound with ropes."[100] "Welcome, with a welcome that fills the land and the cities, and Baṣra and Kūfā, the sites of distant wars, and the land of London, and Washington, and the town of Malabar and Yemen, the home of real men (*dhī ḥamwah*) and pedigreed horses, to

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[92] Many of the characteristics described here parallel the poetry discussed by Saad ʿAbdullah Sowayan in the fifth chapter of his *Nabati Poetry: The Oral Poetry of Arabia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), but the belief in a *jinnī* familiar does not appear in his book.

[93] In Yemeni folk *qaṣāʾid* he poetic daemon may also be described as a *zājil* (Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 274) or a *hātif* (P, 503, Wilhelm Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie der Juden Jemens*, 45.)

[94] Al-Ḥārithī, *Shadwu l-bawādī*, 100: "*Yiqūl abū ṣāliḥ ʿalā qalbī min al-hājūs khaffa / wa-abyāt jitnī fi l-ʿashāʾ mutasābiqāt*."

[95] Ibid., 118: "*yā rāsī al-laylah tadhkur hājisek*."

[96] P: overflow; A: *nahala*—to pant or drink quickly.

[97] Ibid., 143: "*yiqūl akhū raḥmah bidīt al-ʿaṣr wa l-hājis yijīb / mithl al-nahal fa-lā aqbalat yisqūnahā, bidīt fī ʿaraq al-ḥuḍn wa l-shams danat li l-mughīb / uqāyyis ḥurūfī wa-kayf ilḥūnihā*."

[98] Ibid., 185: "*hawājīs qalbī kullamā qult rāḥat jāat / tiʿawwid ʿalayy bi l-yawm khamsat ʿashar marrah*."

[99] Ibid., 228: "*yiqūl akhū ṣāliḥ al-hājis ḍawā fī l-samar / bi-takhbirah min nuhūjih ʿilm willā khabar*."

[100] Ibid., 273: "*mā adrī illā waṣalanī hājis wa l-ḥalīlah / mazlūm min kull ḥāl, wa-qult yā hājisī shuf ʿād baqʿaʾ ṭawīlah / murabbaṭah bi l-ḥibāl*."

the *hawājīs* that answer me with facts and news. I divided up last night one minute at a time (*i.e.*, very slowly)."[101] "I ask al-Ḥaddād, whose *hājis* is well-known, who makes things clear to me on a sleepless night from a vast sea, who lights the lamp, and is not bothered by a barking dog, to be cautious in your behavior…."[102] "The youth, Abū Widād said: yesterday I sang, composed verses, and perfected their rhymes, and my *hawājis* assailed me like a furious flood, or like the waves of the sea striking its shores."[103] "The brother of Misʿid was mute but your *hājis* got him moving."[104] "On a head greyed and exhausted by its *hājis* [who] takes decisive action and brings forth finely wrought verses from it."[105] "I fashioned the rhymes, then my *hājis* came to me, flowing, and my innards erupted with shaking and quaking."[106] "I sang and when the *hawājis* came, flowing—they revolted against [my] emotions and ignited my sorrows."[107] "The brother of Qāyid says: the voice was so loud it hurt and the weeping seemed like it would never cease, and the *ḥalīlah* arrived and [I] wrote [poems], and *hawājis* came to me from near and far so I arose and greeted [my] invisible lovers."[108]

For Yemeni writers, the unusually prominent role of inspiration—whether by means of dreams or *jinn*—has three interlinked explanations. First, the role of dreams as vehicles for Sufis' spiritual teaching adhered to *ḥumaynī* poetry after its transition to a Zaydī courtly context.

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[101] Ibid., 298: "*marḥaban marḥaban yimlā l-barārī wa-li-maṣār / wa l-ʿirāqīn maydān al-ḥurūb al-saḥīqah, wa-arḍ lundun wa-washinṭun wa-kūrih malaybār / wa l-yaman dhī ḥamwah ahl al-khuyūl al-ʿatīqah, bi l-hawājīs dhī jābat lī iʿlām wa-akhbār / qasamt laylat al-bāriḥ daqīqah daqīqah.*"

[102] Ibid., 304: "*wa-asʾal ʿalā l-ḥaddād hū dhī hājisih dawwā wa-dāḥ / dhī samratih laylat tibayyin lī min al-baḥr al-radāḥ, wa ʾʿlaq luh al-miṣbāḥ lā yaʾdhīhim al-kalb bi l-nabāḥ, ḥādhir bi-nāmūsek.…*"

[103] Ibid., 351: "*qāl al-fatā bū widād al-bāriḥ atarannam / wa-naẓẓam abyāt wātakhayyar qawāfīhā, hawājisī mithl sayl al-ṭamm tatalāṭam / aw mithl mawj al-baḥr taḍrub shawāṭīhā.*"

[104] Ibid., 365: "*akhū misʿid atahayyaḍ wa-lahu hājis iḥtarak / wa-yaqbul yakhūḍ al-baḥr khawḍ* (with reference to) *al-marākibī.*"

[105] Ibid., 411: "*ʿalā l-rās shaybah bi-hājis ḍawānī / yakhruj lahu abyāt munqid wa-faḥḥās.*"

[106] Ibid., 461: "*ṣaghat al-qawāfī wa-jānī hājisī yightabba* (*yajrī*) *wa-tafajjarat fī l-ḥashāʾ hizzat wa-zalzal.*"

[107] Ibid., 523: "*ghanayt wa-in al-hawājis jāt mujtarah / thārat ʿalā l-ʿawāṭif talhab ashjānī.*"

[108] Ibid., 458: "*yiqūl akhū qāyid yasij al-ṣawt wa-akthar bi l-naḥīb / wa-in al-ḥalīlah jāt wa-aktharat al-kitāb, wa-in al-hawājis jāt lī mubʿid wa-lī minhā qarīb / wa-qumt anā raḥḥab bi l-ḥabab al-ghiyāb.*"

Secondly, the popular tradition of poetic inspiration by means of *jinn* influenced all writers, both non-elite and elite. Thirdly, many writers expressed distaste for artificiality in poetry and privileged the idea of authentic and unfettered expressions of sentiment. The idea of external inspiration made a good fit with this "proto-Romantic" environment.

The "Safīnah Circle" and Inspiration

The majority of poets who composed *ḥumaynī* poetry, which contradicted the norms of classical Arabic poetry, were willing to defy tradition quietly. In contrast, the poets of the Safīnah Circle, particularly al-Khafanjī, who emphasized the differences between *ḥumaynī* and classical poetry, represent a more radical response to the thematic-linguistic tension between *jidd* and *hazl*. In Chapter Two, I explored the central role of linguistic heteroglossia in these poets' intellectual project. Here, I will return to the poetry of the Safīnah Circle by analyzing its many metapoetic references.

A number of poems in al-Khafanjī's *dīwān* inveigh against him. This demonstrates not only the popularity of invective in the meetings of the Safīnah Circle, but also its chairman's good humor. He was described as being exceedingly ugly: "Your face, O Khafanjī, is a barley *luḥūḥ*;"[109] "You have a beauty mark [so big it makes you look] like a Somali;"[110] "Your nose is a mouse that appeared in a hole, then made quickly for the wall;"[111] "Your moustache looks like a camel's tail [or] terraces whose grain someone's ass has crushed;"[112] and "The gap between your front teeth is as wide as the leg of the "throne" [you sit in and] in which you occasionally break wind."[113]

He is also described as an effeminate old lecher: "How lovely you looked when you came on Yawm al-Ghadīr wearing earrings;"[114] "As for swaying, O ʿAlī, you strut like somebody's wife and your poetic demon

[109] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 153r: "*Wajek yā khafanjī luḥūhat shaʿīr.*" *Luḥūḥ* is a large sourdough flatbread. The fermentation process creates little holes all over the bread, so the image here means that his face was pockmarked.

[110] Ibid., 154r: "*wa-lak khāl fī l-khadd ka l-ṣawmalī.*"

[111] Ibid., 153v: "*Ka-mā nukhratek fār badā min majal / wa-wathab ilā jadrih.*"

[112] Ibid., 153v: "*wa-lak shāribayn mithl sublat baʿīr / jirab qad ʿalāhu jaḥwān.*"

[113] Ibid., 153v: "*Wa-lak khalkhalah mithl rijl al-sarīr / taẓraṭ bihā aḥyān.*"

[114] Ibid., 153r: "*Wa-mā uḥaylāk yawm jīt yawm al-ghadīr / wa-lak fī l-idhān khurṣān.*"

is spice;"[115] and "They said: 'in literature ʿAlī is the bride's hairdresser, he inscribes paper with poetry.'"[116] In a jab at al-Khafanjī, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Fusayyil writes:

> [His] poems are like [unripe] apricots that hurt the molars,
> If you said to him "O Khafanjī, you are losing out,"
> [It would not matter because] his mind is ignorant of truths, He is a moron,
> His farting is like his poetry and his *jidd* is his *mujūn*.

Al-Fusayyil likens poetry to food, which speaks to the cultivated earthiness of the Safīnah Circle. He also accuses al-Khafanjī of equating *jidd* and *hazl*. Since poetic attacks such as this one were tongue-in-cheek, it is possible to conclude that these writers' overall poetic project was to break down the conceptual boundaries between *jidd* and *hazl*.

But not all poems are so optimistic; several poems lament the sorry state of poetry in eighteenth-century Yemen. The following poem, delivered by its Bedouin speaker, mocks the rural *qaṣīdah*:

> Listen, O literary people: among us the *qaṣīdah* does not have a single merit,
> In this age the price of poetry has slumped and its meters are heavy on the ears,
> When its flint is struck one finds it frozen and the sabers of verse have become blunted,
> Do not busy yourselves[117] every night with chilly things and lying rhetoric,
> There are no advantages in the *qaṣīdah*, whether it is long or short,
> There is not a single noble man upon whom you would compose a panegyric, a man generous with his money,
> There is not a single man of learning (you will find only a governor or an ascetic) who knows something other than how to devise legal strategems for acquiring ill-gotten gains,
> There is not a single horseman, showing bravery in God's holy war, slaking the thirst of brown [spears] and white [swords],
> One who is recalled, among the people, as possessing good morals, or who is described in noble terms.[118]

Having despaired of panegyric, the poet turns to the difficulties affecting *ghazal*:

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[115] Ibid., 153v–154r: "*Fa-lak yā ʿalī fī l-mawj / tiʿaṣwar bi-dhāk al-zawj / ka-mā mulaqqinek fī ḥawj*."

[116] Ibid., 153v: "*wa-qālū ʿalī fī l-adab shāriʿah / bi-yanqush waraq bi-ashʿār*." This is a reference to the custom of painting eggs for a wedding.

[117] Amending the text to "*tashghul*" instead of "*tashʿal*."

[118] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 114v–115r.

There are no meeting places for lovers other than Saʿwān, Ahjur, and Ṭawīlah,
If you fall in love with a gazelle from the Ḥāshid confederation, [you will find] that he has no mercy for him who weeps over him,
If you compose a love poem of pearls, a veritable wedding necklace, you [still] will not meet a *kohl*-eyed gazelle,
Nor one whose shape is like a swaying branch, who intoxicates with her coquettish behavior, attractive and moving languorously,
A stray fawn with guarded beauty—there is no way to meet him/her,
Nor one who leaves you, shepherding he-goats, a little sleepless from separation for a few nights.
If he visited you he was sweet and helpful and if he left it was a blessing,
He spends the night talking when he visits you like one asleep (i.e., with languid eyes), telling [you] the *1000 Nights* stories,
If he gives you a cold drink from his red lips, you would stagger as if it were a cold wind,
Stop lusting after wrinkled old women and skeletal people, there is not one beautiful form in existence.[119]

Here, the lack of lovers becomes the rationale for a humorous love affair with a tribesperson. The poet concludes that al-Khafanjī ("Ibn Luqmān") offers the best chance for the redemption of poetry:

Ibn Luqmān's path in the *qaṣīdah* is tender, sweet, and delicate—follow his lead,
In the poetry of license he decreases and adds. Nothing butts in to your speech,
Before you there was the ʿAlī of "Ibn Zāyid says"—with proverbs for which you will find no equal,
O friend, catch these cold [phrases] one after another—they constitute a bad idea,
"This is so boring," "hectares in the mosques,[120]" "as long as Ibn Fāriʿ sings to the accompaniment of a little drum."[121]

Comparing al-Khafanjī to his namesake, ʿAlī b. Zāyid—in whose name many Yemeni proverbs are related—ties Khafanjī's poetry to a folk tradition.

In a similar poem by ʿAbdallah al-Shāmī, the poet holds himself above the poets of the past:

[119] Ibid., 115r.
[120] A: Even the wealthiest cannot buy real estate in mosques; thus, the phrase "*lubān fī l-masājid*" is proverbial for "a waste of time."
[121] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 115r.

ʿAbdallah, the speaker, said: I am the head and the poets of my time are the tail,
I am not afraid of any poet, nor am I apprehensive—I would not even fear al-Maʿarrī,
I am armed with bows and arrows for poetry—Mine hit their mark and he who shoots at me misses,
I am a Zarqāʾ al-Yamāmah in my keen eyesight, I am like a *qādī* and those other than me are milipedes,
Both my extemporaneous and considered compositions are a death sharper than razors, and my tongue is a whetstone for eloquence,
My mind leaves the armies of verse stunned and whenever my eloquence attacks, poetry is thrown down,
Though my countenance is ugly I cut like a diamond—I am very short and I speak frankly,
Though [I] may not have any front teeth [I] still have strong molars that can crush dried beans,
A veiled girl[122] is awestruck by my poetry and she breaks her drum on the second day [of singing it],
I am one with many nicknames—the first is "the imagination of Ibn Hānī," [then]
"the genius of al-Nābighah," "the desert traces of al-Jassās," "al-Ḥassān's valley," [and] "al-Tilimsānī's idle talk."
My eloquence resembles an axe's chopping—I can use it to split the hardest stumps of meaning,
I have a talent for discerning hidden magic and a taste for rhyme, if you please,
You incline your ear towards the poetry of a man with little eyes, *ḥumaynī* [poetry] known near and far.
My poetry is crafted for neʾer-do-wells and it kicks the neck scruffs[123] of puppies.[124]

In a *muwashshaḥ*, al-Khafanjī writes:

A dismissive attitude inheres[125] in men of literature just as [surely] as the ʿAwlaqīs have sharp spears,[126]
They do away ancient poetry, [considering it] a sycophant (lit. a "tail"), like a shoulder strap next to a rifle,

[122] Reading "*bint ghilmāsh*" instead of "*bint ghilmās*" (P, 359).
[123] A: Young street dogs sleep in the doors of houses for warmth. Upon leaving early in the morning, a person might have to kick them out of the way, so this image probably connotes energy and resolve rather than cruelty.
[124] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 118v.
[125] Reading "*jiballah*" with AR.
[126] The Banū ʿAwlaq are a Yemeni tribe. This image occurs as well in a poem where al-Khafanjī eulogizes his deceased cat, whose teeth are compared to the spears of the ʿAwlaqis.

They have lowered the fine shearling coat of *badīʿ* into the dung burning pit[127] and dressed it in *dawlaqī* (?).[128]
So that al-Nuʿmān is a calf's penis and Imru l-Qays is a hobo.

[Today's literature] does not know delicate poetry,
Nor does it have a clear purpose,
When it embarks upon this path.

Al-Buḥturī's poetry wears a poor man's goatskin coat, and you won't meet Ibn al-Nabīh [these days],
Al-Naḥḥās, Ibn Muqlah, Abū Dulaf and al-Muttaqī (AR: "al-Manqī) have [all] been squandered.

Al-Ḥaddād's eloquence remains in the trash heap and al-Ḥājirī is worthless,
A measure of al-Bahāʾ [Zuhayr's] poetry is light and Abū Nuwās is all idle talk,
Al-Khansāʾ has become a servant, she will milk [the cow] for him in the morning.[129]

The act of writing poetry was another common theme. It often formed a discrete section of a polythematic ode, frequently followed by a section of satirical *ghazal*. Al-Khafanjī begins a poem in imitation of the song, "Stop Next to the Abandoned Traces" (*qifū ilāʾ janb dhī l-dār*), in this way:

Savor a *qāt* that nails [your anus to your seat][130] and [let your] blanket sway like a veil,
Walk through the market with a staff and if someone boxes with you, poke him,[131]
There is no shame in being arrogant when your poetry is eloquent,
Be overweening in poetry—and if rain (met. criticism) comes, shelter it [under a canopy],
O composer of poetry, leave some yeast,
and you will have a large hand in catching motifs [mid-air],
If you make the dough of rhyme, be sure you don't bake a flatbread!

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[127] This translation reads "*mallah*" (I, 838) with *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*. AR 69 works as well: "they have brought the fine shearling coat of *badīʿ* down [to the level of] a lowly woolen rug." (*qad baṭanū jarm al-badīʿ bi-shamlah*).

[128] The second hemistich, "*wa-wazzabūh* (get wet) (AR has *wazarūh*—"wrap around") *al-dawlaqī*" is quite obscure. Scrubby seablite, a weed, is called *dūlaq*. Among the uses for this plant, common in many coastal ecosystems, was making dye. Schopen, *Traditionelle Heilmittel in Jemen*, 32–33.

[129] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 94r.

[130] Reading "*qāt mismār*" as an allusion to the proverb "*al-qāt mismār al-juḥr*."

[131] Reading "*fa-ṭʿanih*" with AR 37 rather than *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*'s "*fa-rkannih*" ("ignore him").

> Do not overcook it and be a barker (touchy, like a nervous dog) when grinding it [the flour],
> Loosen its trousers and make their drawstring dangle among us,
> Be liberal with paronomasia, then let it arouse our ecstasy,[132]
> Grab it by the head, my love—this is my rule!
> The mouth's saliva is [poetry's] pepper—he who sips from its scarlet lips goes mad from it.[133]

Ibn Abī l-Rijāl's version of this poem is considerably longer than the Vatican version. The additional section which the former manuscript contains runs:

> Build a lean-to for [poetry] (to block the wind) and put a little window up over here,
> Be generous with the lean-to and leave it to spread joy among us,
> If you want something sub par, know, friend, that this is a rule for us.
>
> Trim off poetry's hair and curl its tresses like a barber,
> If you are summoned to compose poetry do it well,
> Versify! You have a debt to do so, for you owe me a poem [in response],
> Poetry's debt has been settled now that your poetry has shown great eloquence.
> You have taken a long journey with poetry despite all of your hesitation,
> How many have you left, brave, quarreling over a bowl of gruel,
> With horns for butting, but then he saw you, like a stone house (i.e., on your last legs),
> Your poetry has sprouted sidelocks so wash its hands and feet on the Sabbath.
>
> Be merciful towards it when misfortune strikes, otherwise chuck it in the river,
> Compose the dirtiest poems (*jīf al-ashʿār*), otherwise may the flood carry you off, Meter your poetry, neighbor, it does not deserve idle flattery,
> Your poetry puts other poems to sleep so keep it awake at night.[134]

One noteworthy point is the manner in which this passage likens poetry and its composition to the work of some of society's lowest ranks: Jews and *muzayyinūn*.

Al-Khafanjī also describes the composition process in the following manner:

> An ʿAlawī said: I have good fortune in poetry and a female counselor who sifts verses thoroughly,

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[132] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 99r.
[133] Ibid., 99r; AR, 37–38.
[134] AR, 37–38.

> After cleaning and grinding, she strains the ecstasy through my heart [as if it was catching] yellow bran.,
> Poetry's millstone requires roughening every Friday and the axle needs to be moistened,
> Grind rhetorically embellished verse cleverly and knead out [many] baskets[135] worth of flatbread,
> Bake rhymes on the sheet pan of love and heat, [and make] fancy bread and honey cakes with imported refined flour[136].[137]

ʿAbdallah al-Shāmī patterns his contribution to this theme along the lines of the rural *qaṣīdah*, down to its externalized mechanism of poetic composition:

> A stout poet of Shāmī stock says: I have the means to make sweet-voiced poetry on the deserted traces of campsites,
> [I] have a pampered demon that can sweeten what is forbidden and its weapon in *adab* is a rifle,
> [My] demon looks like a section of dike, ugly of form and, as a whole, disheveled,
> However, it has an oratorical power like a vast sea—through its work, *fuṣḥā* speech rises,
> It tears poetry, like bread, into little bits into a steatite dish from Shibām and it stirs artificial images with a long spoon,
> It sticks poetry to the side of a Tihāmī pot and covers it with a dry piece of decorated curtain,
> When it sees that the coals have gone out it lights a fire for baking with fine wood, the likes of which cannot be found in the storage room,
> It takes the best manure and it mixes in year old dung, letting the fire in the stove crackle.[138]

In his piece of self-praise (*iftikhār*), ʿAbdallah b. al-Ḥusayn al-Shāmī likens his own poetry to a piping hot bowl of soup:

> You would think that it was a fine drought of sheep's head soup, mixed with the best fenugreek of Kawkabān,
> Cooked in a pot that has not been cured, its color scarlet like a hot steatite serving dish,

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[135] Here a *double entendre* between *tawārī* (large, round wicker breadbaskets) and the word for "*double entendre*" (*tawriyah*) is probably intended.

[136] I understand "*miṣrī*" as an abbreviated form of "*daqīq miṣrī*" (Egyptian flour). According to Serjeant and Lewcock, "the refined flour is called *daqīq Miṣrī* though it is not actually Egyptian (*Miṣrī*); it is imported. *Ṣanʿā'*, 545n46, 550n96: "'*Miṣrī*' is also the name of a variety of wheat introduced into the Yemen and grown there."

[137] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 93v; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarā'if*, 63.

[138] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 167r.

> A compound with garlic and hot pepper mixed in, (according to the rules of the wise one) with a bit of spice.[139]

He goes on to give the floor to al-Khafanjī, again with a culinary twist:

> He [the Shāmī] has set aside genius and bravery and left them to the ʿAlawī [al-Khafanjī] alone,
> For he is quite needy and his knowledge of the art of literature has captured me,
> In truth, his eloquence is a pot for poetry and he spoons up the choicest motifs.[140]

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Shaghdar insults al-Khafanjī by saying "[you] trade literature for beans and there is no one left to revive it" (*fa-bīʿ al-adab bi l-lasīs wa l-qallī fa mā zād baqī bāʿith*).[141] In fact, this charge possesses a kernel of truth.[142] In the poetry of al-Khafanjī and his compatriots, beans became a suitable topic for poetry, and their preparation an apt metaphor for poetic composition. The poetry-as-food metaphor suggests assiduousness and engages art with daily life.

Occasionally, Safīnah Circle poets describe poetic composition in terms borrowed from construction. For example, al-Khafanjī writes, "Poetry still wants forethought and a scaffold [sturdy enough for] the beautiful beloved to ascend, otherwise it is like a grown man without testicles and with a stick up his ass."[143] Describing his companions in poetry, the same poet refers to work songs sung by builders:

> A group of friends, all possessing refinement, for whom poetry is like a building—they sing while they build,
> They also have zeal and a capacity to frighten that would split a gall bladder, they are skilled at barking out literature,
> If you want literature, you have found it [in them] and if you want delicate expressions they will craft them,
> [Poems that seem] like weapons when drawn and appear more beautiful by careful viewing and they can beautify what is ugly,
> I deliver them a greeting lasting as long as lightning bolts scatter the sky, bringing portents of heavy rains,
> Or as long as a tender branch, wrapped tightly in her *sitārah*, shuffles with little steps, swaying and perplexing lovers,

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[139] Ibid., 118v.
[140] Ibid., 199r.
[141] Or "there is no one left to steal its body from the grave," reading *bāʿith* as a female monster with a pickaxe for one hand and a shovel for the other who digs up new graves (P, 34; B, 93).
[142] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 154r.
[143] Ibid., 94v; AR, 70.

> The pangs of love can be extinguished with buttermilk and cucumbers but they are ignited by clarified butter.[144]

Judging by the metaphorical language Safīnah Circle poets use to describe poetry, it would seem that their poetry responds to what they believed were the most pressing problems of their time. These problems included their frustrations with traditional poetry, namely panegyrists' insincerity and their addressees' stinginess, as well as hackneyed expressions and metrical and rhetorical embellishment. Throwing caution to the wind, these poets abandoned panegyric for parody, adopting a palette of images far removed in subject matter and linguistic register from either the classical *qaṣīdah* or *ḥumaynī ghazal*, and paying scant attention to metrical niceties. Using *ḥumaynī ghazal* as their precedent, these poets reconfigured rhetorical embellishment to the point where plays on words and *double entendres* operated between colloquial and classical words.

The implications of this project suggest these poets' resolution of the *jidd-hazl* dichotomy. Thematically, their poetry breaks down the distinction between *jidd* and *hazl*. (Alternatively, they looked down their noses at *jidd* the way others looked down on *hazl*.) Their humor, as humor is wont to do, involves a degree of social criticism. Therefore, their poetry might be interpreted as *jidd* in its accepted sense. As Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī says, "Seriousness and jesting in *adab* are both serious" (*inna jidd al-adab wa-hazlahu jidd*).[145]

In likening poetic composition to cooking and building, the Safīnah Circle poets criticize the sentimental ideas of poetic inspiration that were popular among *ḥumaynī* poets. Parodying the rural *qaṣīdah* on these themes deflates the idea of a supernatural source of poetry. Their conception of poetic composition seems to have been similar to that prevalent in premodern Arabic literary criticism: poetry as a craft. However, they took "craft" (*ṣināʿah*) quite literally, likening the pursuit of poetry to the life of the marketplace and the greasy spoon.

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[144] Al-Khafanjī, *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 93v; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 64.

[145] G.J. van Gelder, "Arabic Debates of Jest and Earnest," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, ed. G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1991), 201.

The Prestige of Ḥumaynī Poetry

According to Dafari and Taminian, the authors of biographical dictionaries despised *ḥumaynī* poetry.[146] If writers generally viewed *ḥumaynī* poetry disparagingly, they would have had a number of good reasons: as *hazl, ḥumaynī* poetry had what might be thought of as irreverent themes and substandard language. Nevertheless, most writers seem to have held an ambivalent opinion of *ḥumaynī* poetry.

Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, for example, remarks in his *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*: "It would be lovely if I appended a bit of his [Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn's] *muwashshaḥ* poetry for it contains wit that lets souls relax and opens the breast."[147] Classical poets who could compose *ḥumaynī* poetry impressed Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallah b. Ismāʿīl. For him, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ruqayḥī (d. 1748/1749) was "distinguished in every type of poetry, in long compositions and in short compositions and he had a long reach in the *malḥūn* poetry that is known as '*al-ḥumaynī*'."[148] Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaḥḥāf "reached the pinnacle of poetry and prose, classical Arabic poetry (*ḥakamī*), strophic poetry (*muwashshaḥ*), and colloquial poetry (*malḥūn*). He followed the path not taken in literature with his simplicity of phrasing, and clarity of theme."[149]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, the Twelver curmudgeon, criticizes the poet Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥamzi (d. 1700/1701) for using "the solecisms of the common folk" (*laḥn al-ʿāmmah*).[150] Yet he also considers al-Ḥamzī, whose songs, Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā says, were sung in Ṣanʿāʾ, to be "an imām of the *muwashshah*."[151] Similarly, he judges the physician and poet Shaʿbān Salīm al-Rūmī to have had "a strong hand in the composition of *muwashshaḥ*."[152] He concludes that in the

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[146] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 22.

[147] Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Simṭ al-laʾāl fī shiʿr al-āl*, 205r: "*wa-yuḥsinu an nalḥaqa shiʿrahu l-ḥakamīyyi shayʾan min al-shiʿri l-muwashshaḥi fa-innahu mushtamilun ʿalāʾ mulaḥin li l-nufūsi tartāḥu wa-li l-ṣadri tashraḥu*."

[148] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 1:126: "*wa-huwa majīdun fī jamīʿi anwāʿi l-shiʿri muṭawwalātihi wa-maqāṭīʿātihi wa-lahu al-yad al-ṭūlā fī l-shiʿri l-malḥūni l-maʿrūfi bi l-ḥumaynī*."

[149] Ibid., 3:287: "*balagha l-ghāyata fī l-naẓmi wa l-nathri wa-fī l-ḥakamīyyi wa l-muwashshaḥi wa l-malḥūni wa-lahu fī l-adabi ṭarīqatun lam tuslak fī suhūlati l-alfāẓ wa-ṣiḥḥati l-maʿānī*."

[150] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 3:84.

[151] Ibid., 3:84.

[152] Ibid., 2:234–235.

muwashshaḥ "*laḥn* was necessary and it was a sweetness that excites passion and wonder."[153] Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī adds an important qualification to this endorsement of *laḥn*: "The prerequisite for one who wants to write [poetry] is to start with good intention so that he is not censured for what he says and not to show regard for a passion that would show contempt for the Creator."[154]

Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā did not live to witness the experimental *ḥumaynī* poetry of the Safīnah Circle. If he had, their work might have offended his sensibilities, tipping the balance of his conflicted views towards a general opposition to the genre. The Safīnah Circle focused on what made *ḥumaynī* poetry distinctive; they set as their standard the qualities of *hazl*—humorous content, and linguistic vernacular—that would allow the genre to realize its potential. Ironically, their experiments may have caused Yemeni polite society to regard *ḥumaynī* poetry with increased suspicion.

Some critics had reservations about al-Khafanjī's use of dialect. For example, Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallah al-Ḥūthī enjoyed al-Khafanjī's elegy for ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's (d. 1777/1778) cat except for the fact that it was written with *malḥūn*.[155] Likewise, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥajrī says of al-Khafanjī's poetry that it contained "colloquial words and *laḥn*, as you can see, but its meanings are delicate."[156]

For nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, *laḥn* in particular led to opprobium. In *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī complains that the poet Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan Abū Ṭālib's (d. 1756/1757) rhymed prose contained solecisms and *āmmiyyah*.[157] While Muḥammad Zabārah appreciates that al-Qarawānī and al-Shāmī's poem alternates between *jidd* and *hazl*, he laments al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawkabānī's (d. 1848/1849) tendency to ruin good poetry with solecisms.[158]

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[153] Ibid., 1:67: "*Ushturiṭa fihi al-laḥnu wa-huwa ḥulwun yashūqu wa-yarūqu*."

[154] Ibid., 1:67: "*wa-malāku l-amri li-man arāda l-taʾlīfa taqdīmu ḥusni l-niyyati ḥattā lā yuʾākhadhu bi-qawlihi, wa-lā yurāʿī fīhi hawā makhlūqin bi-mā yaskhuṭu l-khāliqa*."

[155] Zabārah, *Nashr al-ʿarf*, 2:80.

[156] Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ al-buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 2:510.

[157] Al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ*, 596: "*Fa-kāna yaʾtī fī asjāʿihi tāratan malḥūnan wa-tāratan yaʾtī bi l-lughati l-ʿāmmiyyati*."

[158] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:332–333.

PART THREE

SHABAZIAN POETRY

CHAPTER FIVE

R. SĀLIM AL-SHABAZĪ AND THE *SHABAZIYYĀT*

The Life of R. Sālim al-Shabazī

In Yemeni Jewish tradition, the biography of Rabbi Sālim al-Shabazī is hagiography. According to tradition, he was a weaver in Taʿïzz,[1] the author of some fifteen thousand poems,[2] and a mystic. His piety and esoteric knowledge fortified his community through the series of punishing decrees and messianic expectations that culminated with the deadly "Mawzaʿ Exile" (*galut Mawzaʿ*) in 1679–1680.[3] According to one legend, al-Shabazī brought this sorry episode to an end by cursing the offending Imām's household. Through his considerable powers, al-Shabazī is said to have traveled to the holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, or Safed on each Sabbath.[4] He may even have been the Messiah himself. After he died, his tomb in Taʿïzz became a place of pilgrimage for Jews and Muslims who sought his intercession, particularly in curing infant illnesses.[5] Relying on Shabazī scholarship and a reading of his poetry, I

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[1] Ratson Halevi, "Ha-Demut ha-shabazit," in *Mebuʿe afikim*, ed. Yosef Daḥoah-Halevi, (Tel Aviv, 1995), 99.

[2] Erich Brauer interpreted this number as a gematriological reference to the kabbalistic *sefirah* "*hod*" (majesty), the numeric value of its constituent letters adding up to fifteen. (*Hod* a thousand times). *Ethnologie*, 354.

[3] On his deathbed, the Zaydī Imām al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl decreed that the prophet Muḥammad's own deathbed testimony that "two religions shall not coexist on the Arabian Peninsula" (an enduring slogan for Sunni traditionalists) applied to Yemen. This radical change in the Muslim state's attitude towards the Jewish minority has been explained in depth by Bernard Haykel as a reflection of the "Sunnification" of Yemeni Zaydism. (*Revival and Reform in Islam*). Mawzaʿ, on the Tihāmah coast, was probably intended as a loading point—the Jews were to be sent to India. In addition to having had their property siezed and synagogues destroyed, an unknown number (as much as half of the total Jewish population) perished during the Mawzaʿ exile.

[4] *Sefer Even Sapir* (1866/1874; repr. Jerusalem: Shocken Institute, 1970), 82; A.Z. Idelsohn and Naphtali Tur-Sinai, *Shire Teman* (Cincinatti: Hebrew Union College, 1930), 90.

[5] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 380–384; S.D. Goitein, *The Land of Sheba: Tales of the Jews of Yemen* (New York: Schocken Press, 1947), 102–104. The folklorist Dov Noy conducted research into the legendary life of al-Shabazī in "R. Shalem Shabazi bi-agadat-ha-ʿam shel yehude teman," in *Boʾi teman*, ed. Yehudah Ratzhaby (Tel Aviv, Afikim, 1967), 106–133; Noy, "Peṭirat Rabi Shalem Shabazi bi-agadat-ha-ʿam ha-temanit," in *Moreshet*

will attempt in this chapter to reconstruct the history of Sālim al-Shabazī and analyze the poetry he wrote.[6]

I will begin with some autobiographical details from al-Shabazīʿs commentary on the Pentateuch, *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*.[7] Al-Shabazī makes the following comment on the verse "a star rises from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17):[8]

> In the year 5379 of Creation, 1931 of the Seleucid era (1619 C.E.), our fathers (may their memories be a blessing) told us that two stars arose from the East with tails like staves. One was to last for 15 days, the other for 40 days and it was said that they were the stars of the Messiah. There is a commentary that says the shorter one was the star of the Messiah, son of Joseph, and the longer one the star of the Messiah, son of David (This star appears every thousand years). I saw what Rabbi Yisrael Safrā ben Yosef (may he be remembered in the world to come) wrote [about this]. I, the youngest of learned writers, Shalem ben Yosef Mashta, known by the name of my town as "al-Shabazī," was born in this very year . . . Today we have reached the year 1957 of the Seleucid era, 5404 of Creation (1646 C.E.) and we are still waiting for the coming of the Messiah, who will only appear after eighty years, as was said regarding Moses (our teacher,

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yehude teman, ed. Yosef Tobi (Jerusalem: Boʾi teman, 1976), 132–149. When I visited al-Shabazī's tomb in 2000 the remains of a structure could be seen along with a retaining wall surrounding a lowered area. A primary school stood there. The owner of the property had recently excavated the spring and shored up the collapsed walls with concrete at his own expense (and mine, as it turned out). It is not clear when this fell apart. Locals told me that a small dome capping an identical structure nearby was the tomb of al-Shabazī's son (Shimʿon, I assume). It had suffered some vandalism.

[6] Yosef Tobi's and Yehudah Ratzhaby's decades of work uncovering the historical Shabazī form the basis of the composite sketch in this Chapter. Tobi's "The Sabbatean Activity in Yemen and its Consequences: The Headdress Decree and the Mawzaʿ Exile," in *The Jews of Yemen: Their History and Culture* is the best treatment of the history of Yemeni Jewry during al-Shabazī's lifetime.

[7] Yehudah Ratzhaby, "Mi hu meḥabro shel 'midrash ḥemdat yamim'," in *Kiryat Sefer* 17 (1940): 245–247; Ratzhaby, "'Al meḥabro shel midrash 'ḥemdat yamim' (heʿarot li-mʿamaro shel Y. Tobi)," in *Tagim* 3–4 (1972): 73–74, has challenged al-Shabazī's authorship of *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*. His contentions rest primarily on questions concerning his genealogy and a perceived disjunction between the content of the commentary and the content of his poetry. Those arguing for al-Shabazī's authorship of *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim* include Rabbi Yosef Qāfiḥ in his introduction to *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim* (Jerusalem, Y. Ḥasid, 1976), Gershom Scholem, "Perakim mi-toldot sifrut ha-kabalah," in *Kiryat Sefer*, 3–4 (1939): 263–277, and Yosef Tobi, who responded point by point to Ratzhaby in "Le-zihuy meḥabro shel midrash ḥemdat yamim ha-temani," in *Tagim* 3–4 (1972): 63–72.

[8] The text is in Scholem, "Perakim," 268; Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 351–352; Tobi, *ʿIyunim bimgilat teman* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 45–46.

> peace be upon him) as it is written "and Moses was eighty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, King of Egypt"….[9]

While this passage enables us to date al-Shabazī's birth to 1619, dating al-Shabazī's death is more difficult.[10]

A poem of al-Shabazī's congratulates Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan (d. 1681) for his successful attack on Aden.[11] Ibn al-Wazīr's *Ṭabaq al-ḥalwā* places this in 1644, affirming Ratzhaby's theory that such a poem would not have been written once this man became the Imām al-Mahdī and adopted anti-Jewish policies.[12] The earliest version of al-Shabazī's *dīwān*, penned by the poet himself, by another during his lifetime, or shortly after his death, mentions the poet in the context of a poem dated 1675 without the telltale "*z*"*l*" acronym (*zikhrono livrakhah*—"may his memory be a blessing").[13]

This manuscript also contains a pair of poems lamenting a famine that struck in 1677/1678. Another poem in this collection treats the "Head-dress Edict" (*gezerat ha-ʿatarot*) of 1679. Three or four poems—one in Hebrew and two in Arabic—deal with the Mawzaʿ Exile of 1679–1680, which the poet may or may not have survived.[14]

Another of al-Shabazī's panegyrics addresses ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn b. Shams al-Dīn. Ratzhaby concludes that this was none other than the "Nābighah of Kawkabān" al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Sharaf

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[9] In the "doctrine of the Dual Messiah," widespread among medieval Jews, the Messiah, son of Joseph, would defeat Israel's enemies on earth. He would be followed by the Messiah, son of David, who would usher in an age of perfection. *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*, 2:208; Yosef Tobi, "Ha-Yehudim taḥat shilṭon ha-ṭurkim be-reshit ha-meʾah ha-17 le-R. Shalem Shabazi," in *Toldot Yehude teman mi-kitvehem* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar u-merkaz dinur, 1980), 45–46.

[10] According to an astronomer consulted by Brauer, a comet was spotted in Europe in December 1618 or January 1619. Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 351, 352n4.

[11] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 76; Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi, eds., *Shirim ḥadashim le-rabi shalem shabazi*, ed. Shalom Seri and Yosef Tobi (Jerusalem: Ben-Tsvi Institute, 1975), 12 (abbreviated "ST"; Ratzhaby, "Teʿudot le-toldot yehude teman," in *Sefunot* 2 (1958): 298–302; Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalom shabazi ve-shirato," in *Sefunot* 9 (1965): 139.

[12] ʿAbdallah b. al-Wazīr, *Ṭabaq al-ḥalwa*, 106–107.

[13] ST, 25.

[14] Tobi (*The Jews of Yemen*, 77n107) disputed Ratzhaby's dating of a poem by al-Shabazī to the Mawzaʿ exile in "Gerush mawzaʿ le-or mekorot ḥadashim," in *Tsiyon* 37 (1972): 197–215. Ratzhaby, "Galut Mawtsaʿ," in *Sefunot* 5 (1961): 349–357; Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 142; Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 35. According to Yemeni Jewish folk tradition, Sālim al-Shabazī survived the Mawzaʿ exile and lived to be ninety-one. Not coincidentally, the great Rabi Shalem Sharʿabī was born the year al-Shabazī died. Ratson Halevi developed a textual argument for al-Shabazī surviving the Mawzaʿ exile: his joyful poems gave way to a rigid and bitter stance towards the outside world, particularly against Arabs. Halevi, "Ha-Demut ha-shabazit," 103.

al-Dīn (1650/1651–1700/1701), who made a claim to the imāmate after the Mawzaʿ Exile.[15] If this identification is accurate, we see a point of contact between a prolific Muslim *ḥumaynī* poet and the archetypal Yemeni Jewish poet. However, the poem makes no reference to the addressee's poetic abilities. Thus, al-Shabazī's life can tentatively be dated 1619 to circa 1679.

The precise spelling of al-Shabazī's first name remains unclear. Though his first name is often given as "Shalom" in Yemeni Jewish tradition, his poems' Hebrew acrostics record "Shalem."[16] His Arabic acrostics furnish the cognate "Sālim." Evidence from the Cairo Genizah suggests that Jews in the Muslim world chose Hebrew names that possessed ready Arabic equivalents.[17] In Yemen, where Hebrew names had set Arabic analogues (*e.g.*, Shalom-Sālim, Seʿadyah-Saʿīd, Zekharyah-Yaḥyā), the connections between these pairs were not always logical.

As for his last name, the *nisbah* "al-Shabazī" derives from the village of al-Shabaz in the Sharʿab region of Yemen north of the city of Taʿizz. However, the poet also calls himself "*al-Mashtaʾī.*" This word presents problems. Bacher interprets the word as deriving from a village called Mashta, as suggested by a phrase that appears in some manuscripts, "*al-Mashtaʾī al-yamānī.*"[18] However, there is no village called Mashta. R. Avraham Naddaf believes that the word derived from the word "*mashta*," meaning "a bit of dough" in the south Yemeni dialect.[19] Goitein concludes that the unusual feminine *nisbah* "*al-Mashtaʾī,*" the traditional utterance of a mother who wanted a boy but gave birth to a girl ("*mā ashtā* [*allah*]"), was the name of the poet's mother.[20] And, indeed, R. Yaʿakov Sapir states that the poet's mother was named

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[15] Ratzhaby, "Teʿudot," 294–298; Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 40. Idelsohn misinterpreted the power dynamics of this poem when he concluded that it was a missive to one of al-Shabazī's Muslim friends. *Shire Teman*, 91. Bacher also gave attention to a love poem in which al-Shabazī praised a Kurdish *amīr* (*Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 83).

[16] Yehudah Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 136n10; ST, 18.

[17] Thus "Eli," who was by no means a central figure in biblical narrative, became the most popular name for Jewish boys in medieval Egypt because of its similarity to "ʿAlī." S.D. Goitein, A *Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:357.

[18] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 33.

[19] According to Shalom Medinah, this was a kneading trough for bread. (P, 137) The main discussions of the word "Mashta" are Scholem, "Perakim," 269, Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 352–353, and Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi," 136n13.

[20] S.D. Goitein, "The Age of the Hebrew Tombstones from Aden," in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962): 82n1.

Mashta.[21] However, many Yemeni Jews, including the famous poet, gave Mashta as their family name.[22] As Erich Brauer concludes, the family name of Mashta at some point became the stuff of etymological legend.[23]

Sālim al-Shabazī's father's name, on the other hand, was Yosef b. Avigad b. Ḥalfon.[24] In Sālim al-Shabazī's poems, he refers to himself as "Ab Yehudah" and "Ab Shimʿon." The only information on the poet's son, Yehudah, who may have died during his father's lifetime, comes from a legend.[25] Al-Shabazī's son, Shimʿon, was a judge and a poet.[26] Shimʿon's tomb was a place of pilgrimage.[27] Al-Shabazī was said to have had a daughter, Shamʿah, who, according to legend, died on her wedding day when the local Muslim ruler tried to kidnap her.[28] Like her father and brother, she may have been a poet.[29] Her burial site at al-ʿUdayn, like her father's and her brother's, was a place of pilgrimage for Jewish and Muslim women.[30] Al-Shabazī may also have had another daughter, Miriam, who died in childhood.[31]

In addition to family, al-Shabazī surrounded himself with books. Al-Shabazī had access to an impressive variety of manuscripts and

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[21] *Sefer Even Sapir*, 82. A headstone naming a Jewish woman called Mashta was discovered in Aden. M.A. Levy, "Jüdische Grabsteine aus Aden," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 21 (1867): 156–157; Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 352n4.

[22] David Sassoon, "Le-Korot ha-yehudim bi-teman," in *Ha-Tsofeh le-ḥokhmat yisraʾel*, ed. C. Blau and S. Hevesi (Budapest, 1931), 15:8; Reuben Ahroni, "Four Unpublished Poems by Yosef Ben-Yisrael, a Sixteenth Century Jewish Yemenite Poet," in *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987): 1–8.

[23] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 23.

[24] Yosef Tobi, "ʿIvrit, aramit ve-ʿaravit bi-shirat yehude teman, bi-miyuḥad bi-shirat rabi shalom shabazi," in *Peʿamim* 30 (1987): 7. On the basis of information in *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*, Scholem concluded that he was a kabbalist. ("Perakim," 271). A recurring Yemeni Jewish tradition identifies Yosef b. Yisrael Mashta, an older kinsman of al-Shabazī's and an important poet, as his father. This historical impossibility enabled Ratzhaby to determine that poems signed "Shalem ben Yosef ben Yisrael Mashta" were spurious.

[25] ST, 19; Noy, "R. Shalem Shabazi bi-agadat ha-ʿam," 113n14.

[26] Yosef Tobi, "Piyuṭ ḥadash le-rabi shimʿon shabazi," in *Afikim* 50 (1977): 15, 28.

[27] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 383.

[28] ST, 19; Noy, "R. Shalem Shabazi bi-agadat ha-ʿam," 114. This seems to be a standard oikotype of Oriental Jewish folklore. In Morocco, the story revolves around Sulikah (Zulaykhah).

[29] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 211.

[30] Brauer, *Ethnologie*, 383–384; Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 138n34; P, 246; Halevi, "Ha-Demut ha-shabazit," 99.

[31] One poem of al-Shabazī's is signed "Abū Maryam." ST, 19; Halevi, "Ha-Demut ha-shabazit," 99.

works produced in the Hebrew presses of Italy and Spain. Scholem's analysis of the sources of one of al-Shabazī's works, *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*, offers a glimpse of the intellectual horizons of a Jewish scholar of rural Lower Yemen in the seventeenth century. In his work, al-Shabazī cites the medieval commentators on the Torah: Avraham b. Ezra, David Kimḥī, and Moshe b. Naḥman. He also quotes Seʿadyah Gaon, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Avraham Maimonides, Ephodi's commentary on the *Guide*, Zekhariyah ha-Rofeh's *Midrash ha-ḥefets*, Levi b. Gershom and Moshe Narboni. From kabbalistic literature, al-Shabazī's true passion, he quotes *Sefer ha-bahir*, Avraham Abulafia's *Sefer Imre Shefer*, the *Zohar*, *Sefer Maʾarekhet ha-elohut*, and, above all, Baḥya b. Asher's commentary on the Torah.[32] Works of *gematria* figure prominently in his reading list. He also cites an oneiromantic work he calls *Sefer meshugaʿ*, which might be translated as "The Book of the Crazy Man."[33]

Other than scattered references to Isaac Luria's *Sefer ha-kavanot*, al-Shabazī was unfamiliar with the "new" kabbalah that emerged in sixteenth-century Safed.[34] Al-Shabazī's poems that refer to Shabbetai Tsvi and R. Nathan of Gaza suggest that he hoped for the success of the Sabbatean movement.[35] Another poem refers to the "tower of strength"

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[32] In several poems al-Shabazī refers to "*Zohar* u-vaḥya."

[33] Scholem, "Perakim," 270–272; Yosef Qāfiḥ, introduction to *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*; Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 139. In several places al-Shabazī refers to magical traditions of "Arab sages" (*ḥakhme ʿarav*). Scholem, "Perakim," 270. Shabazī also reportedly challenged "an Arab sage" to explain why he believed that it was Ishmael whom Abraham bound rather than Isaac. Meir Havazelet, "Cultural Communications Between Jewish and Moslem Scholars in the Late Middle Ages, As Preserved in Yemenite Midrashim," in *Torah and Wisdom*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger (New York: Shengold Publishers, Inc., 1992), 91.

[34] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 55. The fact that al-Shabazī and other Yemeni Jews could be Sabbatean without having been fully cognizant of Lurianic kabbalah bolsters Moshe Idel's revision of the necessary connection Scholem saw between Lurianic kabbalah and Sabbateanism. *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 183–184.

[35] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 83; Tobi, "Shne shirim ʿal meʾoraʿot ha-shabtaʾut bi-teman," in *Peʿamim* 44 (1990), 54; Tobi, *ʿIyunim*, 130–134; Yehudah Ratzhaby, "R. Shalem Shabazi umshiḥiyut shabetay tsvi," in *Molad* 42.252 (1985–1986): 164–172. Tobi, in this article and in *The Jews of Yemen*, apparently concludes the series of arguments over whether or not al-Shabazī was a Sabbatean that began between A.Z. Idelsohn, "Ha-meshorer ha-Temani R. Shalom Shabazi ve-shirato ha-ʿivrit," in *Mizraḥ u-maʿarav* 1 (1919–1920): 8–16, 128–140, and Rabbi Avraham al-Naddāf (in the same journal). Tobi made the important point that Sabbatean thought won very few adherents in Yemen. (This runs counter to Scholem's hypotheses). Shabbetai Tsvi was merely one potential messiah in a long line of messianic movements in Yemen and was readily incorporated

(*migdal ʿoz*) and the "vale of vision" (*ge ḥizayon*), the name of a Sabbatean treatise composed in Yemen during this period.[36] (Sabbateans called Shabbetai Tsvi's prison in Gallipoli "*migdal ʿoz*.")

Despite some scattered kabbalistic writing in the sixteenth century, the seventeenth century saw the efflorescence of kabbalah in Yemen. Kabbalistic circles formed in various places, including the Sharʿab region.[37] In Yemen, the seventeenth century marked a turn from the "Eastern Maimonidean" tradition of philosophical-mystical exegesis to kabbalistic symbolism and concepts.[38]

Al-Shabazī's Poetry: The Serri-Tobi Manuscripts

Scholars have established basic criteria—primarily the analysis of acrostics—to distinguish the authentic poetry of al-Shabazī from pseudepigrapha; however, no critical edition of al-Shabazī's poetry has been attempted.[39] From among the bewildering wealth of manuscripts, several stand out for their historical and literary interest. Two late seventeenth-century *dīwān* manuscripts were discovered in books belonging to a man from Petaḥ Tikvah, R. Ḥayim Sulaymān Taʿizzī. These manuscripts, along with a short collection of poems of al-Shabazī's from a different source, published in a facsimile edition by Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi in 1975 (designated "ST"), hold about one hundred and fifty poems by al-Shabazī and are the oldest manuscripts of their kind.

(and demoted once his failure became evident) in a preexisting local atmosphere of messianic expectation. Tobi, *ʿIyunim*, 115; Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 50, *passim*.

[36] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 82. This treatise was edited by Scholem as "Ge Ḥizayon: apokalipsah shabetaʾit mi-teman," in *Kovets ʿal yad* 4 (1946): 103–141.

[37] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 54; Moshe Hallamish, *Le-Toldot ha-kabalah bi-teman bi-reshit ha-meʾah ha–17: Sefer segulot ve-sefer leḥem shlomo* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1984); Yosef Tobi, "Rabi Yitsḥak Waneh ve-hitḥazkut ha-ʿisuk ba-kabalah," in *Daʿat* 38 (1997): 17–31.

[38] Y. Tsvi Langermann, *Yemenite Midrash: Philosophical Commentaries on the Torah* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996). A survey and bibliography on the topic of the Eastern Maimonidean tradition can be found in Paul Fenton's "The Post-Maimonidean Schools of Exegesis in the East: Abraham Maimonides, the Pietists, Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi and the Yemenite School," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament—The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000), 1:433.

[39] Yehudah Ratzhaby, "Shire R. Shalem Shabazi," in *Kiryat Sefer* 43 (1967): 142; Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 29–30.

Tobi took pains to date these manuscripts. Since the first manuscript does not contain any references to the upheavals of the 1660s, Tobi dated it to before 1667. Tobi dated the second manuscript to 1678/1679 based on two important factors: in the first place, the manuscript containes poems on famines (dated 1678 and 1679), but does not mention the Mawzaʿ Exile; and, in the second place, it contains a poem that describes Imām al-Mahdī Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan in a positive light—something which al-Shabazī would not have done after this Imām began persecuting the Jews.[40] Based on this chronology, Tobi saw the manuscripts as an unfolding spiritual autobiography; poems dealing with wine, comradery, and secular themes give way to a longing for communal redemption during the 1660s.

According to Tobi, al-Shabazī's authorship of the manuscripts rests on the following points. In the first place, the handwriting is very close to that of an autograph Hebrew manuscript of his *Sefer hafṭarayot* (*Kitāb al-raml*) in the Mosad ha-Rav Kook in Jerusalem. Secondly, the manuscripts' systems of notation and the occasional marginal explanations resemble one another. Thirdly, no one but the poet, Tobi argued, would have been able to interpret his poetic language.[41]

The handwriting in ST does indeed bear a striking resemblance to the autograph manuscript of *Sefer hafṭarayot*; nevertheless, ST was written in several hands. Folios are missing and some folios, or series of folios, are inserted without any apparent rhyme or reason. Folio 35v, in the middle of the first manuscript, seems to be the first page of a poetry collection. Tobi concludes that the poetry was copied in 1675 and included in a later collection because it seemed relevant to the surrounding material.

Given the impact of the events of the 1660s, Tobi's overall impression of the manuscripts' date is compelling. It is also possible that al-Shabazī wrote a good number of the folios.[42] The idea that the manuscripts can be set side-by-side to form a historical-poetic autobiography seems more speculative. That is, the friendship poems of the first manuscript may have come from a collection of friendship poems, the historical poems of the second manuscript from among similar poems. In addition, the shift in content Tobi perceived was subtle indeed. In the major contours

[40] ST, 9.
[41] ST, 25–26.
[42] One poem is prefaced "I went to sleep hungry and I was awakened by this poem." ST, 26.

of the poems' themes and imagery, the poetry of the first manuscript does not differ much from that of the second. In any case, such a shift could be explained generically rather than historically.

Given the profusion of poetic imitators and commentators that came hard on the heels of the poet's demise, the reclamation of a Shabazian Ur-text is a worthy enterprise. Here, two points should be made. First, a great majority of the poems in these earliest manuscripts are prefaced with phrases like, "To the tune of ʿYaḥyā says: O Lord…'" (*ʿalā ṣawt yiqūl yaḥya yā rabb*), or, "to the tune of 'God, God, great and praised…'" (*ʿala ṣawt el el gadol u-mehulal*).[43] This indicates that the poetry was already used liturgically. Al-Shabazī may have become the most important Yemeni Jewish poet, but he was evidently not the first to write in this style. Scholars have already pointed to Yosef b. Yisrael Mashta as a precursor to al-Shabazī's poetic style. For example, Yehudah Ratzhaby calls the broader phenomenon to which both poets belonged "the Mashtaʾite efflorescence" (*ha-askolah ha-mashtaʾit*). Given the evidence of creative imitation (*muʿaraḍah*) in ST, the phenomenon seems to have extended well beyond al-Shabazī himself.

Sālim al-Shabazī probably belonged to a circle of poet-mystics with an established poetic style. Like that of his contemporary, the Muslim *ḥumaynī* poet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn, his centrality in the tradition may derive from the breadth and sophistication of his poetic corpus and his close association with the events of the highly significant time period in which he lived. That is to say, just as Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn became emblematic for the adaptation of a Muslim poetic tradition to changed historical circumstances (from Sufi *dhikr*s in Lower Yemen to Highland Zaydī parlors), al-Shabazī represented the shift from a Lower Yemeni tradition of mystical poetry to a sacred text that shaped and sustained the identity of Jews across Yemen after the events of the late seventeenth century.

The second reason that an Ur-text of al-Shabazī is not a necessity of scholarship on him relates to a phrase that appears in the colophon, dated 1719, of the manuscript *dīwān* described by Reuben Levy. It runs: "This is the book of Shabazian strophic poems" (*zeh ha-sefer shel shirot shabaziyyāt*).[44] Ratzhaby notes that this term was used to describe the

[43] Often, the language of the song listed as the basis for the poem is not the same language as that of the poem that follows.

[44] Reuben Levy, "A Collection of Yemenite Piyyutim," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams*, ed. George A. Kohut (New York: Press of the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 269.

poetry of Yosef b. Yisrael Mashta, al-Shabazī, and his son, Shimʿon.[45] A poem in the *Dīwān Ḥafets ḥayim* is titled "*shabaziyyah*" and may or may not be the work of al-Shabazī.[46] As Bacher has already observed, the poetry of the over two hundred Yemeni Jewish poets who lived from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, most of whose biographies are totally unknown, shows a high degree of conventionality and can be viewed as belonging to "Shabazi's school."[47] Insofar as the term "*shabaziyyah*" can be understood as a poetic genre (like *khamriyyah, zuhdiyyah*, and *ṭardiyyah*), the corpus continued to grow long after al-Shabazī's death. This considerable overlapping between al-Shabazī, his immediate predecessors, his heirs, and their poetic form, has led to the scholarly convention of describing all of this material as "Shabazian."

Thus, in appraising the state of al-Shabazī's poetic corpus, one must keep in mind that others—perhaps many—before him contributed to shaping the poetic tradition with which he has become wholly identified, and that many poets who came after him faithfully captured the sound and spirit of his poems. Nevertheless, Shabazian poetry has changed over time. Taking into account the likelihood that ST provides examples of the poetry of al-Shabazī from his lifetime, examples of poems in this chapter draw from this manuscript.

The Roots of the Shabazian Efflorescence

In the seventeenth century, Jewish poets in Lower Yemen began writing kabbalistic strophic poetry, much of it in Arabic.[48] This represented a total shift from the Andalusian poetic model that had dominated Yemeni Jewish literature since the twelfth century. Whereas clever allusions to the Hebrew Bible characterized Andalusian Hebrew poetry and the poetry of its Yemeni imitators, the new poetic style represented a break with that tradition.[49]

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[45] Ratzhaby, "Shire R. Shalem Shabazi," 141n14; Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit* (Tel-Aviv: ʿAm ʿOved, 1988), 38. The valuable introduction to the latter work is a revised version of that in Ratzhaby's *Yalkut Shire Teman* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1968).

[46] The fact that this term only appears once in this collection may indicate that it fell out of style.

[47] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 10, 11, 54.

[48] Bacher identified three traits as the distinguishing features of the Shabazian poetry of seventeenth-century Yemen: bilingualism, a strophic form, and kabbalistic-messianic content. *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 10–11.

[49] See Mark Wagner, "Arabic Influence on Šabazian Poetry in Yemen," in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 51.1 (2006): 117–136.

Al-Shabazī's poetry typified this new style. If the corpus of his poetry is taken as a whole, most of it was written in vernacular Arabic in Hebrew characters, often in alternating strophes of Hebrew and Arabic, less often in wholly Arabic compositions, or, rarely, in alternating hemistiches of the two languages. Some poems were composed entirely in Hebrew; others in Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic.[50] It is likely that al-Shabazī regarded himself as a Hebrew poet first and foremost: in ST, he calls himself "the Hebrew poet" (*al-shāʿir al-ʿibrī*).[51] In one poem, he writes, "I brought forth the holy tongue to the people while I dwelled among Arabs."[52] Considering the attention al-Shabazī paid to Arabic verse, it seems that he did not feel the need to discuss it as a discrete subject because the language came to him easily. Hebrew, on the other hand, represented a greater intellectual investment. In addition, some of the ambivalent and apologetic attitudes towards Arabic poetry that later Yemeni Jewish scholars expressed may have already prevailed in his own time, albeit with less intensity.

Poems attributed to al-Shabazī constitute a large portion of the traditional "*Dīwān*," a collection of non-liturgical poems sung on the Sabbath and at festivals, such as weddings.[53] Thousands of these *dīwān*s are extant in public and private manuscript collections in Israel, Europe, Russia, and the United States.[54] A handful of al-Shabazi's poems appeared in print in the mid-nineteenth century, shortly before the Yemeni Jewish community and al-Shabazī were "discovered" by the wider Jewish world through the travelogue of the Lithuanian-Jerusalemite R. Yaʿakov Sapir.

The *dīwān* was used to accommodate the vast new infusion of poetry generated by the seventeenth-century efflorescence. Nevertheless, *tiklāl*s (prayerbooks), that were organized according to the calendar of festivals, continued to serve as repositories for poetry, the majority of which was Spanish. In the *tiklāl*s of R. Yitsḥak Wanneh (1570–1655) and R. Yaḥyā Sāliḥ (1740–1805), new Yemeni poetry supplanted the Spanish poems in sections entitled "*shirot ve-tishbaḥot*." An individual *dīwān*'s contents depended on its copyist's taste and, perhaps, his geographical origin. (According to Ratzhaby, South Yemeni copyists organized their

[50] Yosef Tobi, "ʿIvrit, aramit ve-ʿaravit," 3–22.
[51] ST, 64v.
[52] ST, 93r: "*avīʿ lᵃshon qodash lᵃ-rov vānī shᵃkhantī vayn ʿᵃrov*."
[53] According to Ratzhaby, his poems account for a third of all extant premodern Yemeni Jewish poems. "Shire R. Shalem Shabazi," 141.
[54] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 7.

poems haphazardly and included poems relevant to daily life). Headings before each poem indicated genre, melody, and sometimes the dance for which it was intended. The *dīwān* has a long, narrow shape because Jews' tables were low, small, and full of food, leaving little room for books. The singer held the *dīwān* in his left hand and drank or signaled dancers with his right.[55]

*Dīwān*s classify poetry in three main categories: *nashīd*, *shirah*, and *qaṣīd*. The *nashīd* is a religious poem, usually in rhyming hemistiches of Hebrew, each normally sung or recited by one person[56] as the prelude to *shirah* (the *muwashshaḥ* form). *Qaṣīd* is secular folk poetry composed in colloquial Arabic. The "boasting match" (*mufākharah*) is an important *qaṣīd* genre.[57] Other genres that make their first appearance in *dīwān*s are *zafāt* and *ḥiduyot* for weddings.[58] Sometimes they include *piyuṭim*[59] and *halelot*.[60]

I will limit my discussion to the *shirot*, which Yemeni Jews considered the heart of the poetic corpus and Idelsohn aptly describes

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[55] Ibid., 37–40; Tobi, "Beyn shirat teman le-shirat sefarad," 307.

[56] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 25–26. Compare the humorous poem jointly written by Ibrāhīm al-Hindī and Ibrāhīm al-Yāfiʿī in Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī, *Nasmat al-saḥar*, 1:92.

[57] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 30–31; Ratzhaby, "Shire katsid temaniyim," in *Yuval* 5, (1986): 169–191; Wilhelm Bacher, "Zur Rangstreit-Literatur Aus der arabischen Poesie der Juden Jemens," in *Mélanges Hartwig Derenbourg* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909), 131–147. Yosef Qāfiḥ recorded a "boasting-match" between coffee and *qāt* by Shalom Shabazī composed entirely in Arabic in his *Ḥalikhot teman*, 224–225. In this poem, wine steps forward to win the contest in the end. A "boasting-match" between water and wine was included in a Yemeni Passover Haggadah. Wilhelm Bacher, "More About the Poetry of the Jews of Yemen: Seven Yemenite Poetical Collections in New York City," in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 2 (1911–1912): 384. Keeping in mind the well-established link between Jews and wine in the Yemeni Muslim popular imagination, this piece might represent a bit of interreligious polemic.

[58] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 28; Gamlieli, *Ahavat Teman*, 139–140.

[59] Liturgical poetry (*piyuṭ*), which occupied a major place in the literary output of many premodern Jewish communities, had a relatively limited role in Yemeni Jewish literature. The strict limitations on the proper occasions for the recitation of *piyuṭ* in the synagogue introduced by some of the Babylonian Geonim and by Maimonides were taken quite seriously by Yemeni Jews. As a result, the majority of *piyuṭim* composed in Yemen were *seliḥot* for Yom Kippur. Some Aramaic "*maranot*" based on Babylonian *piyuṭ* were also composed in Yemen. ST, 20; Tobi, "Beyn shirat teman le-shirat sefarad," 316–317; Mishael Maswari-Caspi, *Piyuṭe ha-maranot bi-seder ha-raḥamim she-be-tiklāl yehude teman* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poʿalim, 1982). Such early Yemeni *piyuṭim* lost their place in poetic manuscripts to Shabazian poetry. Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 18.

[60] Poems wholly composed in Aramaic, called *halelot*, would have been performed between the *nishvad* and the *shirot*. (ST, 20). Sometimes they occupy their own section in *dīwān*s, as in the case of Serri-Tobi.

as "the greatest achievement of the Yemenite muse" that "in general, is identical with artistic poetry."[61] Of the approximately one hundred and fifty poems in ST, two-thirds are *shirot*. Of these, one-fourth are composed in Arabic (in Hebrew characters), one-fourth in Hebrew, and roughly half use alternating strophes of Hebrew and Arabic. A small handful of *shirot* are written in Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic. Another manuscript, discussed by Levy, one-fourth of whose poems are attributed to al-Shabazī, contains sixty Hebrew poems, sixty Arabic poems, and ninety-five Hebrew-Arabic poems. The remaining poems are *piyuṭim* and Aramaic *halelot*.[62] This linguistic breakdown resembles that of ST.

What precipitated the change in seventeenth-century Jewish poetry in Yemen? In his study, Wilhelm Bacher suggests that the Shabazian *shirot* had some Andalusian Jewish forebears. After all, Andalusian Jewish poets like Yehudah Halevi and Yehudah al-Ḥarizi had used Arabic and Aramaic in their poems.[63] Nevertheless, at a time when European knowledge of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry was limited to the entries on Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn and ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī in Karl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Bacher concludes that the Shabazian poem possessed a strong Arabic influence. He writes, "The putative flourishing of Arabic poetry in Yemen, which had an unavoidable influence on the Yemeni Jews, was probably the reason that Arabic begins to predominate with the poetry of Schibzi [*sic*]."[64] Bacher speculates that the recurring poetic forms that begin some of al-Shabazī's Arabic (or Hebrew-Arabic) poems—such as "*ilbas al-nūr*…" and "*ākhir al-layl*…," "*burayq*…," "*shajānī*…"—were based on Arabic poems.[65]

In a 1919 article on al-Shabazī, A.Z. Idelsohn goes further than Bacher. He writes, "One must suspect that many Yemeni [Jewish] poems are free translations from the Arabic, especially secular poems like 'In a dream I saw a pure maiden' (*raʾiti be-ḥalom ʿalmah nakiyah*) and the like."[66] However, in his 1931 *Hebraische Melodienschatz*, Idelsohn argues that the poetry of Hebrew poets inspired by and affiliated

[61] A.Z. Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), 1:13.
[62] Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 165.
[63] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 63–64.
[64] Ibid., 47.
[65] Ibid., 47.
[66] Idelsohn, "Ha-Meshorer ha-temani R. Shalom ben Yosef Shabazi," 13.

with the kabbalah of Safed—the so-called "*shirat ha-ḥen*"—provided the chief stimulus for the mystical content of Shabazian poetry.[67] This group includes the work of the poets Yisrael Najārah (d. 1626), Yosef Ganso (seventeenth century), Menaḥem Di Lonzano (d. before 1624), Shimʿon Labi (sixteenth century), Shlomo Alkabets (d. 1576) and Isaac Luria (d. 1572). In *Shire Teman* (1930), Idelsohn identifies Yisrael Najārah, a Hebrew poet of seventeenth-century Syria, as an important influence on the content of al-Shabazī's poetry.[68] Idelsohn concludes that the Yemeni poet and scholar Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī[69] introduced the strophic form and Hebrew-Arabic bilingualism to Yemen. Al-Shabazī followed in his footsteps.[70]

David Semah, who was familiar with Muslim *ḥumaynī* poetry, demonstrates that the Shabazian *shirah* used the *ḥumaynī* "compound *muwashshaḥ*" form.[71] Nevertheless, Semah repeats Idelsohn's contention that al-Ḍāhirī introduced this form in the sixteenth century.[72] Semah also doubts that Arabic models influenced the thematic concerns of Yemeni Jewish poetry. He writes, "[Such influence] is possible, but it is important to remember that the Arabic portions are influenced by Jewish religious ideas.…"[73] In a similar vein, Tova Rosen-Moked grants

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[67] Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies*, 1:8, 10.

[68] Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 93.

[69] The *nisbah* "al-Ẓāhirī" or "al-Ḍāhirī" presents problems. According to Ratzhaby, the *nisbah* derives from a place name. Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar: Maḥberot R. Zekharyah al-Ẓāhirī*, ed. Yehudah Ratzhaby (Jerusalem: Ben Tsvi Institute, 1965), 41. Scholarship on this author consistently transliterates his name "al-Ḍāhirī." In the Judeo-Yemeni text of ST the same character is used to represent both the letter "*ḍād*" and the letter "*ẓā*". In addition, Yehoshua Blau noted that medieval Judeo-Arabic also showed signs of slippage between these two letters. *Dikduk ha-ʿaravit-ha-yehudit shel yeme ha-beynayim* (1961; repr. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 39. In his handbook of Yemeni place names, *Qāḍī* Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥajrī lists two places called "al-Ḍahr." He comments that the place name "al-Ẓāhir" is used both in several specific place names of northern Yemeni villages and as a general term for the "heights" or "mountains" of a given locale. *Majmūʿ buldān al-yamān*, 2:554, 563. The author in question lived in Kawkabān. The place name "al-Ḍahr" lacks an *alif* after the *ḍād*, therefore making the "al-Ḍāhirī" transliteration problematic in this regard. Although I think that the spelling "al-Ẓāhirī" is a better option, I have used the "al-Ḍāhirī" spelling for ease of recognition.

[70] Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 91.

[71] David Semah, "Limkorotav ha-tsuraniyim shel shir ha-ʿezor ha-temani," in *Tarbits* 58 (1989): 239–260. S.M. Stern also posed the question of the link between the form of *ḥumaynī* poetry and that of Shabazian poetry. *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), 76.

[72] Semah, "Limkorotav," 252.

[73] Ibid., 239n2.

Yemeni Arabic influence on the form of the Shabazian *muwashshaḥ*, but repeats the contention that its content was manifestly indebted to Lurianic kabbalah.[74]

Yehudah Ratzhaby, who contends that Shabazian poetry was closer to the Aramaic of the Talmud and the *Zohar* than to Arabic, voices a deeper skepticism towards a local Arabic influence on the content of Shabazian poetry.[75] Following Idelsohn, Ratzhaby judges Lurianic kabbalah—particularly its expression in poetry—to be the chief motivating factor behind the radical shift in seventeenth-century Yemeni Jewish poetry[76] and sees Arabic influence only in a few non-religious Arabic poems (*qiṣvad*) of al-Shabazī's.[77]

Yosef Tobi's views on the subject of Arabic influence on the emergence of Shabazian poetry seem to have evolved over time. In the introduction to the ST manuscripts (1975), he points to Yosef b. Yisrael as the most influential forerunner to Shabazian poetry.[78] In an article written the same year, he argues that the emergence of Shabazian poetry in the seventeenth century stemmed directly from the "national-religious" poetry of Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī and Yosef b. Yisrael, Yemeni poets who represented a link to the new kabbalah of Safed and its poetic representatives.[79] After deciding upon Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī as the central link between Safed and Yemen, *shirat ha-ḥen* and Shabazian poetry,[80] Tobi revised the chronology of the emergence of Shabazian poetry, dating it to the sixteenth century in subsequent publications.[81]

Tobi, an astute observer of linkages between Yemeni Jewish and Yemeni Muslim cultures, concludes that the question of *ḥumaynī* poetry's influence on Shabazian poetry was a "matter [which] still requires systematic examination."[82] He allows that *ḥumaynī* poetry's strophic form influenced Shabazian poetry. In addition, the allegorical

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[74] Tova Rosen-Moked, *La-ezor shir: Toldotav shel shir ha-ezor ha-ʿivri* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1985), 129.

[75] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 33.

[76] Ibid., 13.

[77] Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalom Shabazi ve-Shirato," 146–147.

[78] ST, 24.

[79] Tobi, "Beyn shirat teman le-shirat sefarad," 313–314; Tobi, "Rabi Yitsḥak Waneh," 18.

[80] Tobi, "'Ivrit, aramit ve-ʿaravit," 8; Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 54.

[81] Tobi, "Ḥikuy u-makor be-shiratam shel yehude teman," in *Peʿamim* 2 (1979), 34; Tobi, "'Ivrit, aramit, ve-ʿaravit," 14–15.

[82] Tobi, "Ḥikuy u-makor," 38; Tobi, "'Ivrit, aramit, ve-ʿaravit," 14–15.

love poetry found among Sufis strikes him as a possible nexus between Muslim and Jewish poetry.[83] This thought, as we will see, was a prescient one.

Where Idelsohn, Ratzhaby, Tobi, Rosen-Moked, and Semah allow for the possibility of Arabic influence on the Shabazian poem, Ezra Fleischer marshals their reservations for what I call an "intra-Jewish" explanation of the emergence of this literary form in Yemen. He insists that the poetry of Yisrael Najārah served as the primary model for Shabazian poetry.[84] Like Bacher and those who followed him, Fleischer finds precedent for literary bilingualism in al-Andalus. He also adduces an impressive array of Hebrew *muwashshaḥāt* that used compound forms, some of them quite similar to the "compound *muwashshaḥ*" of Yemen. He concludes:

> We only have a little information on Yemeni poetry before the seventeenth century but it seems, fundamentally, that the seventeenth century did not represent a revolution in this poetry's reality. It was a mighty outburst of its creative powers: in a giant sweep it realized the various beginnings that had preceded it.[85]

The intra-Jewish hypothesis for the emergence of the Shabazian poem—whether in its most robust form as articulated by Fleischer, or in the formulations of Idelsohn, Tobi, Ratzhaby, Semah, and Rosen-Moked—centers on three figures: Yisrael Najārah, Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī, and Yosef b. Yisrael.

Yisrael Najārah's poetry resembles Shabazian poetry in several respects. It is strophic and intended for musical performance. It uses the erotic language of the Song of Songs to express the love of God.[86] His poems served kabbalists, particularly for their dawn vigils.[87] For both Najārah and al-Shabazī, dreams could inspire poetry.[88] Najārah's poetry

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[83] Tobi, "'Ivrit, aramit, ve-ʿaravit," 14–15.

[84] Ezra Fleischer, "Taḥanot bi-hitpaṭḥut shire ha-ezor ha-ʿivri: (Misfarad ve-ʿad teman)," in *Meḥkarim bi-sifrut ʿam yisraʾel uvitarbut teman: Sefer ha-yovel le-prof. Yehudah Ratzhaby*, ed. Yehudit Dishon and Ephraim Ḥazzan (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1991), 144.

[85] Ibid., 144n97.

[86] Andreas Tietze and Joseph Yahalom, *Ottoman Melodies, Hebrew Hymns: A Sixteenth Century Cross-Cultural Adventure* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kaido, 1995), 18–20.

[87] Ibid., 15–16.

[88] A.M. Habermann, "Shirim she-nitḥabru be-ḥalom," in *Maḥberot le-sifrut* 4.1 (1946): 114–115.

also shows an engagement with Sufism.[89] His poetry was printed several times and exercised a powerful influence, especially in Italy. Therefore, any Muslim influence to be found in Shabazian poetry might simply be the result of Najārah's engagement with Sufism.

Upon closer examination, however, the parallels between Najārah's poetry and Shabazian poetry prove to be superficial. Najārah modeled each of his strophic poems on an Ottoman Turkish song. Some of these strophic forms happen to be similar to forms used in Shabazian poetry. Poems consisting of four-line stanzas can be found in Najārah's poetry and in Shabazian poetry, but the four-line stanza was the most common form in all of Middle Eastern folk poetry.[90] Najārah's work was so closely tied to Ottoman musical traditions that he intended some of his Hebrew wordings to echo the Turkish originals.[91] Bacher has noted that Najārah's poetry employed a syllabic metrical system while Shabazian poetry used the quantitative meter of Arabic and Andalusian Hebrew poetry.[92]

A writer of love poetry in Hebrew probably could not avoid echoing the Song of Songs. Both Najārah and the poets of Yemen would have known the esoteric signification of this book from rabbinic and kabbalistic sources and would have been familiar with its application in liturgical poetry by Spanish Hebrew poets like Yehudah Halevi. Both Yisrael Najārah's poetry and Shabazian poetry possess a Sufi dimension.[93]

What evidence shows that the poets of seventeenth-century Yemen knew Yisrael Najārah's poetry and the broader tradition of "*shirat ha-ḥen*" (*ḥokhmah nistarah*) to which he belonged? Scholars who uphold this view see Yaḥyā (Zekharyah) al-Ḍāhirī, a sixteenth-century Yemeni Jewish writer, as the link.[94] Al-Ḍāhirī is variously held as the

[89] Paul Fenton, "Israel Najâra, un poète hébreu au carrefour de la mystique musulmane," in *Dédale* 11–12 (2000): 638–644; Tietze and Yahalom, *Ottoman Melodies, Hebrew Hymns*, 20–22.

[90] Ibid., 50.

[91] Ibid., 16–17.

[92] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 66; Rosen-Moked, *La-ezor shir*, 129.

[93] These similarities were already noted by R. Yaʿakov Sapir, who identified poems by Yisrael Najārah that had been mistakenly attributed to al-Shabazī. Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 19, 30.

[94] This man has a variety of names. He is called Yaḥyā b. Seʿadyah, Zekharyah b. Seʿadyah, Ḥayim b. Seʿadyah and "Avner." Yaḥyā is an Arabic equivalent to the name Zekharyah among Yemeni Jews. Steinschneider, *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden*, 256;

last and greatest Yemeni exponent of the Andalusian Hebrew neoclassical style (Ratzhaby), the pioneer of the Hebrew-Arabic strophic poem (Idelsohn), the link between Yemeni Jewish poetry and the poets of Safed kabbalah (Ratzhaby, Tobi) and, more generally, the importer of Lurianic kabbalah to Yemen.

The literary work for which al-Ḍāhirī is primarily known is his *Sefer ha-musar*, a collection of Hebrew *maqāmāt* interspersed with the author's poems, written in the Andalusian Hebrew style.[95] *Sefer ha-musar* contains forty-five rhymed prose narratives that detail the adventures of Avner b. Ḥaleq and the narrator, Mordekhai ha-Tsidoni, among the Jewish communities of India, Persia, the Levant, North Africa, and Yemen. On the basis of historical details found in *Sefer ha-musar*, scholars have understood the book as a travelogue recording the adventures of the poet and scholar Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī, whose name, based on *gematria*, equals the names of the two main characters.[96]

The sixth *maḥberet* recounts Mordekhai ha-Tsidoni's visit to Safed. There he visits the academy of the great legal codifier and ascetic Joseph Caro, who delivers a sermon "according to the plain meaning and to kabbalah."[97] Afterwards, a gifted student of Caro's rises and holds forth on the faculties of the soul. When he finishes speaking, he is revealed to be none other than Avner b. Ḥaleq, the book's protagonist.

The 25th *maḥberet* tells the story of an emissary from the rabbinical academy of Tiberias, R. Avraham b. Yitsḥak Ashkenazi, who comes to Yemen to sell books in order to raise money for the academy. According to Avraham Yaʾari, R. Ashkenazi was a historical figure in whose

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Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 24; Bacher, "More About the Poetry of the Jews of Yemen: Seven Yemenite Poetical Collections in New York City," 386–387; Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 24; Tobi, "Rabi Yitsḥak Waneh," 18–19. Ahroni, "Four Unpublished Poems," 2–3, also wrote: "It is widely held that he and his predecessor Zeharia al-Dhahri (ca. 1516–ca. 1581) laid the ground, both in form and content, for the most celebrated Yemenite poet, Shalom Shabazi."

[95] According to Ratzhaby, the changes in seventeenth-century poetry affected rhymed prose narratives as well. Yaḥyā Ḥarāzī's *Netivot ha-emunah* and R. Seʿadyah Manṣūrah's *Sefer ha-maḥashavah* (ed. Y. Ratzhaby) show an affinity for the language of Shabazian poetry. *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 32. The new style of rhymed prose narrative even influenced Ḥayim Ḥibshush's account of his travels as a guide to the French archaeologist Joseph Halévy. Al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 22–23; Tobi, "Beyn shirat teman le-shirat sefarad," 319.

[96] Al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 10n6; Yosef Braslavsky, *Le-Ḥeker artsenu* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Histadrut ha-klalit shel haʿovdim haʿivriyim bi-erets yisraʾel, 1954), 203n54; S.D. Goitein, *From the Land of Sheba*, 20.

[97] Al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 117: "*ʿal derekh ha-peshet ve-ha-kabalah*."

Safed home the first Hebrew printing press in Asia was built in 1577.[98] Al-Ḍāhirī praises him highly, noting especially his remarkable knowledge of Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord*.[99] Elsewhere in *Sefer ha-musar*, Avner b. Ḥaleq gives an overall assessment of the lands he visited and the Jewish scholarship he learned along the way:

> "When the Lord made me wander from my father's house" (Gen. 20:13) I found scholars and writers in every place. The fire of Exile burned inside me in India, Baṣra, and Baghdad until my mind was nearly frazzled. [It was so] in Erekh, Akkad, Khalneh (Gen. 10:10) and Netsivim, the [burial] place of the learned *tana*, Rabbi Yehudah b. Betira. [It was so] in Ḥammāh, Damascus, and Syria, in Safed and in Tiberias. There [I found] a lofty folk, "Those who fear the Lord [who] have been discoursing with one another" (Mal. 3:16) at their head stood Rabbi Joseph Caro, the sagely Rabbi Moshe Maṭrani, and Rabbi Moses Cordovero, the kabbalist who "sends forth his roots by a stream" (Jer. 17:8)…[100]

Ratzhaby concludes that al-Ḍāhirī—whether through his time in Safed, his conversations with R. Ashkenazi in Yemen, or his perusal of books the rabbi brought—became familiar with Safed kabbalah and the school of poetry associated with it.[101] In the first hemistich of the verse, "I first think of the consequences of my actions / I adorn the face of my generation, 'the elect of my brothers' (Deut. 33:16)" (*kets maʿasī reshit le-maḥshavi / hadrat pene ha-dor nezir aḥim*), Ratzhaby detects the influence of the hemistich in Shlomo Alkabets's famous Sabbath hymn, "*Lekha Dodi*." He reads, "what ends in action begins in thought" (*sof maʿaseh be-maḥshavah teḥilah*).[102] In the margins of the manuscripts of *Sefer ha-musar*, subsequent writers have commented upon al-Ḍāhirī's line, "Surely every man garners praise by his intellect, his majesty, his piety, and his faith" (*hakhi khol ish lefi sikhlo yehulal / ve-tifʾarto ve-yirʾato ve-dato*) by pointing out a parallel in a poem by Menaḥem di Lonzano.[103] The last piece of evidence for al-Ḍāhirī's familiarity with Lurianic kabbalah and *shirat ha-ḥen* is the version of Shimʿon Labi's

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[98] He printed an edition of Yisrael Najārah's *Zmirot Yisra'el* shortly after his return to Safed in 1587. Avraham Yaʾari, *Meḥkere sefer: Perakim bi-toldot ha-sefer ha-ʿivri* (Jerusalem, 1958), 164; al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 39; Tobi, "Rabi Yitsḥak Waneh," 19n12.

[99] Al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 40. He is described in the fortieth *maḥberet* (423–425).

[100] Ibid., 287. A more general description of the scholars of Safed can be found on 426.

[101] Ibid., 43–44.

[102] Ibid., 210n166.

[103] Ibid., 378n81. This verse quotes Prov. 12:8.

hymn, "Bar Yoḥai, happy are you now that you have been anointed" (*Bar yoḥai nimshakhta ashrekha*). This version ends with a couplet of al-Ḍāhirī's devising and other *piyuṭim* of his intended to accompany the Lurianic *Tikun Ḥatsot* ritual.[104]

From the passage quoted above describing Safed, one can safely conclude that al-Ḍahrī knew that there was an important kabbalist who lived there named Moses Cordovero. However, of the many books quoted in *Sefer ha-musar* and in al-Ḍāhirī's commentary on the Torah, *Tseydah la-derekh*, no Lurianic titles or collections of *shirat ha-ḥen* emerge.[105] His available sources strongly resemble the list compiled by Scholem from al-Shabazī's *Midrash Ḥemdat Yamim*. It is not clear whether or not R. Ashkenazi sold books dealing with the new kabbalah on his trip to Yemen.[106]

Al-Ḍāhirī's lone putative allusion to Alkabets may be a coincidence. If not, al-Ḍāhirī may have read such poems in Italian-printed prayer books of the Sephardi rite without having known entire collections of them.[107] The similarity of a verse by di Lonzano to a verse by al-Ḍāhirī does not prove a link between the two poets. In sum, the case for al-Ḍāhirī serving as a link between the theosophical system of Isaac Luria and his school, its poetic expression, and Shabazian poetry in Yemen, is a shaky one. It is unclear what, if any, evidence Idelsohn relied upon

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[104] Yosef Tobi, "Seder 'Bi-ashmoret ha-boker' le-r. Yaḥyā al-Ḍāhirī," in *Afikim* 37 (1970): 12–13; Tobi, "Piyuṭ ḥadash le-r. Yaḥyā al-Ḍāhirī," in *Afikim* 38, (1971): 15–16.

[105] According to Ratzhaby, *Tseydah la-derekh* most often quotes Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, the *Zohar*, and *Shaʿare Orah* by Joseph Gikatilla. Al-Ḍāhirī's commentary on Genesis was printed in the edition of the *Tāj* (the Yemeni version of the Torah with its commentaries) by Shimʿon Graydi (Tel Aviv, 1940). Al-Ḍāhirī, *Sefer ha-musar*, 44.

[106] Among Yemeni Jews, Zekharyah al-Ḍāhirī is considered the founder of kabbalah in Yemen, a fact that arose in the debate over the legitimacy of kabbalah (to be discussed more fully in the next Chapter). R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, the central figure in the anti-kabbalistic "*Dor Deʿah*" movement, wrote that "the faith in this new foreign kabbalah was introduced to Yemen by the books that were brought at the time of Rabbi al-Ḍāhirī and there was never a kabbalist anywhere in Yemen before him, and our ancient books attest to this." Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Milḥamot ha-shem* (Jerusalem, 1931), 114; Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 54n24; Tobi, "Rabi Yitsḥak Waneh," 17; Hallamish, *Le-Toldot ha-kabalah bi-teman*, 10.

[107] Alkabets's "*Lekha Dodī*" was first published in Venice in 1584 in a Sephardi prayerbook.

for his conclusion that al-Ḍāhirī was the first to write Hebrew-Arabic strophic poems and was the founder of the Shabazian style.[108]

Even if al-Ḍāhirī was not responsible for introducing the new kabbalah to Yemen or inventing the Shabazian poem, the poetry of Safed kabbalah eventually arrived in Yemen. A central figure in this regard was R. Yitsḥak Wanneh of Dhamār, who was possibly the first to include new liturgy that drew from Sephardi prayerbooks and kabbalistic practices.[109] Of his significant literary output, his *Tiklāl Paʿamon Zahav* is most important for our purposes because it includes three poems by Najārah,[110] three poems by Isaac Luria,[111] and the previously mentioned poems by Alkabets and Labi.[112] The poems by Najārah included in Wanneh's *Tiklāl* do not seem reminiscent of Shabazian *shirot*, either formally or thematically; nor do Luria's Aramaic hymns.

There is reason to be skeptical about al-Shabazī's firsthand knowledge of Lurianic kabbalah. ʿAmram Qoraḥ already points this out in his commentary on the *dīwān*. There is even more reason to suspect whether he was significantly exposed to, and stimulated by, *shirat ha-ḥen*. The current state of research on Yemeni Jewish mysticism does not permit firm conclusions about the diffusion of Lurianic teachings in Yemen. There is, however, a discrepancy between Scholem's and ʿAmram Qoraḥ's observation that al-Shabazī was unaware of Lurianic teachings, and the idea propounded by Idelsohn and many others that Shabazian poetry arose as a result of these teachings. Al-Shabazī and the circle of Lower Yemeni kabbalists to which he belonged may have been unaware of or unconcerned with the most current developments in kabbalistic thought. They may have been part of a local group of kabbalists whose views grew directly from pre-Lurianic kabbalistic

[108] Aside from four poems that are transpositions of local Arabic (Muslim-authored) poems into Hebrew characters (Yehudah ʿAmir, "Shirim ḥadashim mi-diwan R. Z. al-Ḍāhirī," in *Mebuʿe afikim*, ed. Yosef Daḥoah-Halevi (Tel Aviv, Afikim, 1995) 126), none of al-Ḍāhirī's own extant compositions seem to have contained any Arabic.

[109] Moshe Hallamish, "Ha-kabalah bi-siduro shel rabi yitsḥak waneh," in *Tema* 5 (1995): 66–67; Moshe Gavra, "Le-foʿolo shel rabi yitsḥak waneh bi-siduro 'paʿamon zahav'," in *Tema* 4 (1994): 64.

[110] These appear successively in *Zmirot Yisraʾel*, ed. Yehudah Fris-Ḥoreb (Tel Aviv: Maḥberot le-sifrut, 1946), 513–518.

[111] Yehudah Liebes, "Zemirot lisʿudot shabat she-yasad ha-ari ha-kadosh," in *Molad* 4.27 (1972): 541–555.

[112] These are found in MSS dating from the mid-seventeenth century. Yosef Tobi, *Kitve ha-yad ha-temaniyim bi-makhon ben-tsvi* (Jerusalem; Ben Tsvi Institute, 1982), 82–94.

thinking. Some Yemeni kabbalists, particularly in places like Ṣanʿāʾ and Dhamār, may have possessed a piecemeal knowledge of Lurianic works. However, it remains unclear whether and in what fashion this knowledge was disseminated to the kabbalists of Sharʿab.

The religious milieu of seventeenth-century Yemeni Jewry shows a number of broad parallels to Safed: kabbalistic ideas, powerful messianic currents, and erotic mystical strophic poetry. Yet these similarities do not necessitate a strong connection between Yemen and Safed. Evidence indicates that some Yemeni Jews adopted supererogatory liturgical practices associated with Safed kabbalah, such as midnight prayers (*tikun ḥatsot)* and mystical feasts (*seʿudot)*. However, the theosophical doctrines of this school, especially Moses Cordovero's systematic reworking of kabbalistic theology and Isaac Luria's influential theories, do not appear in the poetry in question.[113] Messianism distinguished Yemeni Judaism long before this period and continued apace into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One way to achieve a more accurate understanding of these similarities between Yemen and Safed and their poetry is by examining the extent to which Yemeni poems interacted with mainstream Muslim Arab culture.

In order to support Fleischer's hypothesis of the "intra-Jewish" genesis of Shabazian poetry, one must believe that Yemeni Jewish poets, oblivious to their Muslim neighbors' widespread tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry, derived the very same formal structures and themes from authentically Jewish models. Moreover, the work of Andreas Tietze and Yosef Yahalom demonstrates that Yisrael Najārah, a chief writer of *shirat ha-ḥen*, studiously patterned his poems according to exemplars from the Turkish and Arabic culture that surrounded him.

Recently, Moshe Piamenta proposed a very strong thematic connection between Yemeni Jewish and *ḥumaynī* poetry. He writes:

> There is no doubt in my mind that R. Shalem Shabazī…and the Jewish poets of Yemen borrowed the colloquial *ḥumaynī* poetry of its period and were influenced by it in their choice of similes, metaphors and metonymies, though theirs was sacred poetry. They learned to weave the language of colloquial Yemeni poetry and its figurative symbols into topics

[113] Ratzhaby identified what he believed to be a Lurianic motif in Shabazī's poetry. "Shir mashiḥi mitkufat shabetay tsvi mi-ʿito shel r. shalem shabazi," in *Peʿamim* 44 (1990): 66. Dani Bar-Maʿoz interpreted the phrase "*klipot raʿ ḥitson*" in a poem by al-Shabazi as a manifestly Lurianic image. Dani Bar-Maʿoz, "Hishtarshut ha-kabalah bi-teman," in *Tema* 7 (2001): 96.

> [ranging from] the people of Israel, its God, religion, messiah, aspirations and duties, to the building of the holy Temple and the return to Zion.[114]

Piamenta's work renders moot the bifurcation of form and content in the longstanding debate over the Shabazian efflorescence. Shabazian poetry borrowed the model of the *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥ* and used its language to express Jewish beliefs. In structure, language, and content, the Shabazian Hebrew-Arabic poem was a hybrid form. This line of thinking goes back to Bacher, whose attention was initially drawn to Yemeni Jewish poetry and its remarkable bilingualism (*Doppelsprachlichkeit*). "In Jewish literature and perhaps in all of world literature one will search in vain," writes Bacher, "for two entirely different languages like Hebrew and Arabic being used as media of poetic expression with equal rights."[115] Shabazian bilingualism shows that "Jewish and Arabic were intimately connected in the cultural life of South Arabian Jews."[116]

Piamenta's work on this subject has some drawbacks. He compares terms for beauty in Yemeni Jewish poetry (in all genres) to terms for beauty in the *ḥumaynī* poetry of Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, ʿAlī al-ʿAnsī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, the published anthology of al-Khafanjī's poetry, and secondary works in Arabic on *ḥumaynī* poetry. All of these are Highland Yemeni writers who lived later than al-Shabazī and who, with the exception of the first figure, represent the non-mystical version of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. Most scholars agree that Jewish women's poetry and the *qaṣīd* genre were influenced to a great extent by Yemeni Arabic-Islamic culture. Therefore, by including these poems in his inventory, rather than focusing on the *shirot*, Piamenta may have weakened the force of his argument.

In addition, with the exception of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn, the Muslim *ḥumaynī* poets whose *dīwān*s Piamenta uses for the purposes of comparison lived in Highland Yemen. As has been discussed

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[114] Moshe Piamenta, "Mi-sdeh ha-yofi ha-enoshi, ha-elohi ve-ha-meshiḥi bi-shirat teman ha-ʿaravit," in *Orhot Teman: Leshon, historiyah ve-ḥevrah, ḥikre sifrut*, ed. Shalom Gamliel, Mishael Maswari-Caspi, Shimʿon Avizemer (Jerusalem: Hotsʾat Makhon Shalom le-shivṭe Yeshurun, 1983/1984), 37. In his Arabic adaptation of this article, Piamenta wrote: "The Yemeni Jewish *muwashshaḥ*…was influenced in form and in content by Arabic poetry, especially *ḥumaynī* poetry…." "al-Jamāl al-ḥissī al-jismānī fī balāghati l-shiʿr al-yamanī al-ḥumaynī wa l-yahūdī l-mutadarrij ilā l-ʿāmmiyyah (dirāsah lughawiyyah)," in *al-Karmil—Abḥāth fī l-lughah wa l-adab* 18–19 (1997–1998): 95.

[115] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 63.

[116] Ibid., 11.

in Chapter One, these were based on the poetry that developed among Sufis in Lower Yemen. The poems of these Sufis are the best place to look for Arabic influence on the Shabazian poem.[117]

The Arabic strophes of bilingual Hebrew-Arabic and all-Arabic Shabazian poems drew freely from the motifs of Sufi poetry. One poem of al-Shabazī's is described in ST as having been composed "as a response to 'O singing camel-driver'" (*jawāb ḥādī l-maṭāyā*).[118] The image of the camel driver, whose humming guided his herds, was a favorite of Sufi poets. Some precedents for Shabazian poetic convention may be located in the *dīwān* of Ibn al-ʿArabī. For example, many Shabazian poems begin with variations of the verb *labisa*. Ibn al-ʿArabi's *dīwān* includes poems with the same feature.[119] A number of all-Arabic poems attributed to al-Shabazī devote a verse to each letter of the alphabet. Precedent for this technique can be found in a poem by Ibn al-ʿArabī.[120] This also points to a movement of Sufi musical-poetic traditions from Spain and North Africa, via Ibn al-ʿArabī, to Sufi circles in Lower Yemen.

Many Shabazian poems open with a description of lightning. Anthologizers group such poems together on account of their characteristic beginning: "A little lightning bolt flashed" (*baraq burayq*). The extended image of a rain storm is already found in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The image of the lightning bolt finds ample precedent in the *ḥumaynī* poetry of Yemeni Sufis. A celebrated Yemeni Sufi poet, ʿUmar b. ʿAbdallāh Bā Makhramah, uses the image often in his poems, referring to "*bariq al-najd*" and "*barq al-ḥimā*." In Bā Makhramah's poems, as in Shabazian poetry, the description of the lightning may precede metaphysical discussions.

The motif of lightning is just one of the many similarities between the poetry of Bā Makhramah and Shabazian poetry. Both Bā Makhrama's mystical poems and Shabazian poetry include descriptions of gardens, singing birds, and beautiful youths (*ghizlān*). Both the poetry

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[117] The most prominent Yemeni Sufi poets of Lower Yemen and Ḥaḍramawt who wrote *ḥumaynī* poetry are: Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān (d. 1266/1267), ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. ʿAlī al-Burʿī (d. 1400/1401), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī (d. 1465/1466), Abū Bakr b. ʿAbdallah al-ʿAydarūs (d. 1508/1509), ʿUmar b. ʿAbdallah Bā Makhramah (d. 1546/1547), "al-Hādī" Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sūdī (d. 1525/1526), Ḥātim b. Aḥmad al-Ahdal (d. 1604/1605), ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlawi al-Ḥaddād (d. 1719/1720), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muṣṭafā al-ʿAydarūs (d. 1778). See Wagner, "Arabic Influence," 133–134.

[118] ST, 158.

[119] *Dīwān Ibn al-ʿArabī* (Cairo: Bulāq, 1855), 53–59.

[120] Ibid., 317.

of Bā Makhramah and Shabazian poetry devote special attention to the radiance of the youth's face (*jabīn* or *muḥayyā*), contrasted with the darkness of his hair (*jaʿd*). Both corpora describe him as a prince (*amīr*) and compare him to the biblical or Qurʾānic Joseph. Both corpora describe wine drinking and musical performance. They also make clear that these lyrical themes possess mystical resonance. Both Bā Makhramah's poetry and Shabazian poetry contain extended descriptions of Paradise, theophanic visions, and dreams. Both invoke the poetic muse (*hājis*). Whereas Bā Makhramah's poems describe an audience, usually "the lovers" (*al-aḥbāb, ahl al-hawā, al-muḥibbūn*) or "the scholars" (*ahl al-fann*), Shabazian poetry addresses "the rabbis from among the lovers" (*aḥbār al-aḥbāb*). Thus, a comparison of the poetry of one Yemeni Sufi poet, Bā Makhramah, with Shabazian poetry, shows an abundance of parallel wordings and shared motifs from the realm of the mystical interpretation of Arabic lyric poetry (*ghazal*).[121]

One legend tells how R. Sālim al-Shabazī left his loom to take up the geomantic arts when he heard about the activities of a certain Muslim scholar named "Ibn ʿAlwān." Ibn ʿAlwān's powers in interpreting the sand table drew many Jews to him. Al-Shabazī provided a Jewish alternative.[122] The famous Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān (d. 1267) lived much earlier than al-Shabazī but there were Yemeni Sufis in the late sixteenth century who numbered themselves among his followers. In his *Ṭabaq al-ḥalwā*, ʿAbdallah al-Wazīr describes how a "man from among the ascetics (*fuqarāʾ*) of the *shaykh* Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān" leapt from the fortress of Thulā and miraculously survived in 1674/1675.[123] If the legend of al-Shabazī's competition with someone affiliated with Ibn ʿAlwān can be said to contain an historical kernel, it may be that the Jewish poet and mystic's intellectual contribution was, at one point, envisioned as a Jewish equivalent to Sufism.

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[121] My analysis is based on a copy of Bā Makhramah's *dīwān* in the collection of the Aḥqāf library in Tarīm, Ḥaḍramawt (MS 2254). Similar comparisons on the basis of other Yemeni Sufi poets may yield additional rewards. Ḥātim al-Ahdal may be a particularly worthy candidate for such a comparison. Bacher noted that a MS of Shabazian poetry quoted an Arabic love poem by one "Ibn al-Ahdal." *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 59.

[122] Avraham al-Naddāf, *Zekhor le-avraham: Kovets amarot ṭehorot*, ed. ʿUziel al-Naddāf (Jerusalem: Shlomo b. Avraham Ḥayim al-Naddāf, 1992), no page number (includes *Seride teman*).

[123] ʿAbdallah al-Wazīr, *Ṭabaq al-ḥalwā*, 314.

The influence of Sufi poetry seems to have been indirect: it was spread among Jews through overheard songs at evening *dhikr*s or at the village market rather than through written texts. The diction and thematic range of Shabazian poetry, not to mention its theological dimensions, differ substantially from Muslim Sufi poetry. Sufi *ḥumaynī* poetry provides one recurring building block in this edifice. By juxtaposing Arabic *ḥumaynī* lyrics with Hebrew esoteric images, Shabazian poems allow the Arabic verses to acquire a kabbalistic import.

In sum, the Arabic influence on Shabazian poetry was twofold. First, Sufi *ḥumaynī* poetry made an impact. Second, the Shabazian poem often manifests the characteristics of the rural *qaṣīdah*. These issues and the characteristics of Shabazian poetry will be developed in the discussion of three selected poems from ST that follows. These poems will be followed by pericopes on topics of central importance to the understanding of Shabazian poetry. A hypothetical reconstruction of each poem's pronunciation and prosody follows in Appendix 3. I have not been able to "correct" the scansion of the sections marked in bold print in the transliterated text. These matters will be explained in Appendix 3.

The Shabazian Poem in Focus

Poem One (fols. 99b–100b)

1 The little lightning bolt of Yemen flashed, despite the overwhelming darkness,
2 Spurring on sheets of dewy rain to the joy of mankind,
3 The rivers of Paradise are streams, watering the roses and the flowers,[124]
4 It emanates the first light and illuminates the east and the north.

5 It ripens crops,
6 And the rivers and the seas,
7 And the herbs and the flowers.

8 When the storm clouds rise the waves churn,
9 And the noble ocean is loaded with excellent things to eat.

10 Isn't it wonderful when the wind strikes, ripening the crops in their furrows?

[124] This word, "*mashām*," may mean "flowers" in the sense that the *sh.m.m.* root connotes something that smells good. Ratson Halevi glosses this word and a variant, "*mashmūm*," as "incense" (*bosem*). *Shirat Yisraʾel bi-teman* (Kiryat Ono: Makhon mishnat ha-rambam, 1998), 1:156, 190.

11 Give praise to God, who is the opener of breasts,
12 [The opener] of flowers so that they spread their perfume when Virgo is ascendant.
13 Exalt Him who is the most virtuous, Who spreads out his emanation as wine.[125]

14 He perfected the creation of Man,
15 He is eloquent, making man's tongue speak,
16 Making good deeds abundant.[126]

17 His Intellect is perfect and he determines that which is licit and that which is forbidden,
18 But when a miserable man sins He still loves him.

19 He created the angels and the spheres on the day of His fashioning,
20 He gave them perception so that they would praise His name,
21 They circle him, obeying his command,
22 And the lunar sphere shines for a set number of days.

23 He overpowers the Sun,
24 Cloaked in the light of Paradise,
25 [Emanating] from the Holy Shrine.

26 He beautifies forms—in His gathering them they reach perfection,
27 In the past and in the future He is the king who governs all affairs.[127]

28 My troubled mind wanders off and my nature is disturbed,
29 I have always remained smitten, longing for drunkenness.
30 My lover is still asleep—he left me, spurned,[128]
31 But the generous nobles sent me a cup of wine.

32 Choice (wines) are selected for me,
33 Shining from a blue cup,
34 Balm for burning thoughts.

35 [The mind of] him who tastes an ancient honeyed wine that grants rest wanders off,
36 His thoughts are upset until he gets drunk and falls asleep.

37 My love, with a drink of wine you would comfort my thoughts,
38 For I have a heart that is desirous and perplexed by everything,
39 Lover, get up and return—appear at my door!
40 I do not think that you are stingy, however, towards the Muse of poetry.

41 For your hand is generous,
42 and you call for assistance in support of us in our state,

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[125] "Continually" (*mā dām*)—rather than "wine" (*mudām*)—would also fit well here.
[126] Or "*my* tongue" and "*my* deeds."
[127] Literally: "He holds the reins" (*mustaḥīṭ zimām*).
[128] "*Taraknī bi-wuḥshatī*" could also mean "He left me to my desolation."

43 Would that [you] would open your hand.

44 He who looks for sustenance behaves admirably and should not pay heed to [idle] talk,
45 [He] is gold without blemish [rest of line obscure].

46 He who invites guests and honors them has a pure soul,
47 He is stalwart among learned men and every visitor makes him their boon companion.
48 Verses of poetry require the appropriate motifs,
49 And the soul will not tarry when the good times have come.

50 He praises his Creator,
51 Who provides him with sustenance,
52 And gives him many good things to taste.

53 He contemplates—he is not ignorant—his mind becomes light when he stands up,
54 He inquires about the secret of the sciences that the average man never sips.[129]

55 Run of the mill people require laws (which are relaxed among the learned)
56 Their Intellect is preserved,
57 And they exalt their guests,
58 They obey the Holy One and fear Him in their actions,
59 He encompasses them and apportions beneficence to them out of His goodness,

60 Love him who loves the Lord,
61 So that your heart will exult
62 And your sins will be forgiven.

63 He who is surrounded by grievous sin becomes weary and achieves only enmity,
64 His soul shakes violently with lust and vanity.

65 My speech is finished and it has served its purpose well,
66 Exalted be the King on high, the ruler and the lord,
67 Praise be to Him who forgives an errant slave,
68 Who pardons the sin of the man who has gone astray, both the repentant and the bewildered.

69 Having finished my speech,
70 I praise God,
71 For his grace that waters us.

72 I trust in His Name, for He never sleeps,
73 Noblest peace be upon Him who shows patience for the lowly.

[129] "*Lā yahsif al-ʿawāmm*" could also mean "He is not disgraced by average men."

I would like to begin an analysis of this poem by making a few linguistic, orthographic, and structural observations. The preceding poem was composed entirely in Arabic using Hebrew characters. The manuscript, like other collections of Yemeni Jewish poetry both printed and in manuscript, uses the letters *aleph*, *vav*, and *yod* at the ends of words where the meter requires long vowels. Nunnation is indicated with the final *nun*. These features may be significant with reference to the broader tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry in Yemen because they take some of the guesswork out of scansion. It may be the case that Yemeni Jews composed their strophic poems according to Khalīlian meters whereas Muslims did not, following the prosodic conventions they were familiar with from Andalusian Hebrew verse. On the other hand, it is possible that Jews, unencumbered by either a highly sophisticated knowledge or a cultural veneration of the Arabic language, simply represented Arabic the way it sounded. Thus, while a Muslim writer, particularly an *ʿālim* already a bit anxious about his forays into the *ḥumaynī* genre, would probably disapprove of displaying metrically lengthened vowels by means of letters on the page, a Jew would be unaware of or unconcerned with such a taboo. In addition, the manuscript's use of the Hebrew vowels *tsayray* and *pataḥ* enables the reader to distinguish between an "eh" vowel sound and an "ah" vowel sound, which Arabic vowels do not. See Appendix 3 on the implications of ST's orthography on its prosody.

Moving on to the themes of Shabazi's poetry, the preceding poem uses a variety of linguistic registers.[130] The poem's language alternates among lyricism (such as the opening storm tableau and the wine), the language of Arabic Neoplatonism (such as Soul, Intellect, emanation, and light imagery), and pious homiletic language. The poem uses the form of the compound *muwashshaḥ*.

The apparently deliberate blurring between Paradise and the rainy terraces of Yemen found in al-Shabazī's poem also finds precedent in the work of Bā Makhramah (d. 1546/47). Al-Shabazī's agricultural references to cisterns, irrigation channels, and Virgo ascendant show a heightened awareness of this technique.

[130] See Mark Wagner, "Major Themes in the Poetry of R. Salim al-Shabazi," in *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Letters in Honor of Raymond P. Scheindlin*, ed. Jonathan Decter and Michael Rand (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007): 225–247.

A vision of Paradise constitutes one of the central constituent themes of al-Shabazī's poetry. In his poems, the soul, freed from the body by means of sleep or supererogatory nighttime prayer vigils, beholds various aspects of the divine realm, which are portrayed in conventional images. One of these is a vision of Paradise. The following verses exemplify this theme: "[The soul] loves the bounty of Paradise, where roses and sweet basil are planted… [R]ivers continually emanate from and encircle it."[131] "I want to reach the Abode of Life where the souls are hurled [after] the bodies vanish and they remain among all manner of roses, apple trees, and jasmine."[132] "Four rivers flow in the Garden of Eden—you behold angels in each river, as well as many roses, apple trees, and the finest flowers."[133] "Behold the Immortal Garden on the day the Soul courts her mate. Pick roses in the lofty reaches of Paradise."[134]

The prominent theme of wine and drunkenness in the preceding poem is found in many other poems of al-Shabazī. For example: "Temper the wine of plucked grapes with water and be generous—let us enjoy the wine of the cups";[135] "Friend, send my message. We will relax and let our souls rejoice, among noble rabbis, we will drink from flagons and salute each other."[136] The wine theme has strong parallels in Yemeni Sufi poetry as a whole and in Bā Makhramah, where the cup, passed around, mimics the movement of the spheres and drunkenness the mystic's ecstasy. In verses twenty-eight to thirty-seven of al-Shabazī's poem, wine offers the speaker reprieve from his passion for his sleeping lover and it soothes his "burning thoughts." The poem's description of God as "the Opener of Breasts" (*mushriḥ al-ṣudūr*), an image of Qurʾānic provenance, is paralleled in many Yemeni Sufi poems.[137]

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[131] ST, 49v: "*wᵃ-tahwī ṭībat al-fardūs wa-buh maghrūs / zuhūr al-ward wa l-rayḥān* […] *wu-fihi fayḍ al-nuhūr dāyir*."

[132] Ibid., 72r: "*shawqᵃnā yaḥṣul li-dār al-ḥᵃyāh / ḥayth mā al-arwāḥ mutahāwiyāt / al-jusūm tafnā wᵃ-hun bāqiyāt / bayn ward afnān wᵃ-tufāḥ wa-full*."

[133] Ibid., 77r: "*bi l-jīnān arbaʿ anhār tajrī / min ʿadnān / tanẓur amlāk fī kul nahrī / miʿa afnān ward wa-tufāḥ wᵃ-aṭyāb zahri*."

[134] Ibid., 4v: "*wᵃ-anẓur janat al-khuldi / bi-yawm al-nafs tatawaddi / wᵃ-tajni zahrat al-wardi / bi-fardūs al-ʿulā*."

[135] Ibid., 48r: "*wᵃ-imzuj min qᵃṭīf al-rāḥ wᵃ-kun samāḥ / nᵃṭīb fī khumrat al-adnān*" (understanding "*al-adnān*" as an unusual plural for of "*dann*." Compare al-Ḥibshī, *al-Adab al-yamanī*, 215.) Alternatively, the writer may have intended "*khamrat ʿadnān*", "a heavenly wine."

[136] Ibid., 79r: "*yā ṣāḥ ballegh niyyᵃtī / shānaʿqed al-rāḥah tᵃṭīb al-arwāḥ / mā bayn aḥbār sādᵃti / nashrab wᵃ-nathayyā bi-shurb al-aqdāḥ*."

[137] Several terms and images of Muslim provenance appear in al-Shabazī's poetry. These include the imagery of Paradise (more on this below), the word "*qurʾān*," (ST,

A number of clues as to the circumstances surrounding the poem's composition and recitation emerge from the text. Verse four, where the lightning flash "emanates the first light" and verse thirty-six, where "…his thoughts are upset until he gets drunk and falls asleep," may point to the poem's composition as part of a mystical dawn vigil. A great number of the poems in ST refer, usually in the beginning of the poem, to sleeping. The dreaming soul, according to these poems, leaves the body, enabling it to witness the workings of the divine world. For example: "The soul pays no heed [to the body] during sleep—it ascends to the Chair of the Shrine….";[138] "In a dream my soul follows and benefits from the souls of my lords…souls converse while the bodies are far away."[139] One poem is preceded with this disclaimer: "I went to sleep hungry and I was awakened by this poem."[140] Other poems make reference to waking in the middle of the night (possibly the *Tikun ḥatsot* ritual or a local variant): "If you arise at midnight your intellect will be revealed";[141] "Awake in the middle of the night and let my lord awaken my vision."[142]

Poetic accounts of dream visions do not seem to have been a subgenre of al-Shabazī's poetry. Rather, they are a major component of poems clearly intended for varying audiences: the addressees of friendship poems, those attending kabbalistic symposia, nocturnal vigils, Sabbath festivities, or guests at weddings.[143]

The many references to the groom (*ʿarūs*) in al-Shabazī's poetry, as well as the symbolic Hebrew words "*tsvi*" and "*tsviyah*" (male and female gazelle), make clear that a good number of his poems were composed for weddings.[144] One poem contains the line: "Abū Shimʿon said: my speech has come to a close with the [word unclear] of my Lord so I invite the couple to relax, enjoying food and drink—I repose among

54v, 61r) the terms "*lawḥ maḥfūẓ*," (ST, 17r) and "*laylat al-qadr*"; Ratzhaby, "Rabi Shalem Shabazi ve-shirato," 139.

[138] ST, 92r: "*al-nafs waqt al-nawm tuwallī / taʿal lᵃ-kisʾe hekhᵃli*."

[139] Ibid., 22r–22v: "*wᵃ-rūḥī bi-ḥulm al-lᵃyal tastᵃqīd / tuhāwī li-rūḥ sādᵃtī tastᵃfid / al-anfus tᵃnādim wa l-ajsām* (22v) *bᵃʿīd*."

[140] Ibid., 53v: "*yashanti raʿev ninʿarti be-shir zeh*."

[141] Ibid., 56r: "*vᵃ-taqum ba-ḥᵃtsot layloh / vᵃ-sikhlokh nagdᵃkho nigloh*."

[142] Ibid., 167r: "*be-ḥᵃtsot layil ʿūri vᵃ-ʿōrᵃri baʿle ḥazyōn*."

[143] One poem in ST is expressly devoted to Shabbat (157r). Shabbat is also mentioned as the occasion for the protagonist's mystical journey in 22v. "Three meals" (*shalosh seʿudot*) are mentioned in 157v, v.14 and "*seʿudot*" appears in 89v.

[144] "*al-ʿᵃrūs*" (ST, 49v), "*al-aʿrās*" (70r, 71v, 75v, 99r, 100v), "*ʿᵃrāʾis*" (89r).

Sages."[145] That al-Shabazī's poetry plays a prominent role in contemporary Yemeni Jewish weddings is well-known, but the many references to the *ʿarūs* and the *aʿrās* show that his poetry was also used at weddings in the poet's own lifetime.

Al-Shabazī's poetry seems to offer some clues about the poet's notion of inspiration. In verse forty of this poem, the lover, who is not "stingy towards the Muse of poetry" (*hātif al-niẓām*) is probably God or the Messiah. The figure of the Muse (the *hājis*, or *hātif*[146]), familiar from the rural *qaṣīdah*, here becomes a divine intermediary. The poem's proclamation in verse sixty-five, "My speech is finished and it has served its purpose well," also strongly echoes the rural *qaṣīdah*.

This poem blurs the distinction between personal, collective, and metaphysical realities. The "lowly" one of the final verse could refer to a variety of protagonists in widening circles: the poet who wanders between Jewish communities in search of sustenance, the Jews of Yemen or Diaspora Jewry as a whole, or the human soul, which is barred from its point of origin by its material body or the flawed world of corporeal existence. Other verses of al-Shabazī's share this pain of banishment: "I cry out from poverty and misery because I have been cast out, humiliated, in Yemen."[147] The following presents a metaphysical version: "Repent and you will find respite—you are prostrate, your body wounded—your soul flits away, [you are] thrown down like a drunk."[148] Similarly, the Holy Shrine (*al-haykal al-qudsī*) of verse twenty-five may signify contemporary Jerusalem, the Temple in Jerusalem as it was before it was destroyed, or the inner sanctum in the presence of God.

The next poem is composed in alternating strophes of Hebrew and Arabic, the most common form of the Shabazian *muwashshaḥ*. Here, as in most other poems taking this form, the initial strophe is most often composed in Hebrew. Its *taqfīl*s (the third elements of each strophe) differ from the standard pattern in that they include three hemistiches rather than the customary couplet. The first strophe is missing a line of the *tawshīḥ* and the entire *taqfīl*.

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[145] Ibid., 84v "*qāl ᵃbū shamʿūn khᵃtamnā / qawlᵃnā fī* (?) *rabī / dāʿī ilā l-aʿrās ʿᵃzamnā / nastᵃrīḥ fī ʿaysh wᵃ-shurbī / vayn al-aḥbār istᵃraḥnā.*…"

[146] Ibid., 40r, 55r, 84r, 128r; 47v, 61r, 100r.

[147] Ibid., 57r: "*atsʿak me-ʿōni vᵃ-dalūt / ki oni gōlah ū-mishlokh bi-gvūle temon bᵃ-shiflūt*."

[148] Ibid., 103v: "*tub tastᵃrīḥ / anak jᵃrīḥ / jismak ṭᵃrīḥ / wa l-nafs rīḥ / hāwī mᵃʿā l-sakrah*."

Poem Two (fols. 77b–79a)

1 Love for an honored woman illuminates my mind's eye and my imagination,
2 While I praise her beauty, for she comforts me in my exile.
3 My soul is like a lone bird and each night she greets the face of my Lord,

4 For she is accompanied by the Commander of the Army,
5 Ascending to the Houses of Love.
6 She stands among cherubs.

7 My joy and great exultation are renewed, parted from my bodily form,
She raises me up at dawn.

8 The soul perceives its aim—she is smitten, in love with the Intellect,
9 She travels among brightly shining stars, ascending to the Throne to gain her favor,
10 Holding fast to piety and faith despite being afflicted by the body by means of the Left line,
11 It continually corrupts [corporeal] life—men's desires are for ignorance and lowliness.

12 The soul wants to know her,
13 To act piously and to worship her Lord,
14 It longs for her orchard.

15 She is saved from sins and trials, she returns to the Abode of Initiation,
In the Garden she clothes herself in the light of Intellect.

16 [This is] the request of my awe-inspiring woman to her lover, [a man] who wants the exiles to be a treasure,
17 He stands among myrtles, asking for our return to the way we were in the beginning,
18 Return from your wandering, precious one, arise at dawn and pray,
19 Leave the cast-off handmaiden, wake my multitudes with a call for repentance.

20 Hurry to do good for my God,
21 Recite a new song,
22 Magnify God's salvation.

23 Perhaps in a time of His choosing He will exalt me, I remember His name and declare His unity, He will refresh my strength and my song.

24 O Creator, make Your will clear, grant us Your favor that we may be illuminated by your grace,
25 Free the sick prisoner, and return us in goodness lest we be destroyed,
26 The souls ascend, going upwards, seeking faith in Your shadow,
27 They yearn for the Abode of Guidance that was created at the beginning of Time.

28 Remember our fathers' covenant,
29 fulfill Your promise to us,
30 That we may return to our Holy House.

31 We will listen to the melodies and themes of poetry—Put an end to the envious Left, make all of us stronger than our passions.
32 Remembering the miserable wretch, [You] send nourishment when it is needed,
33 You are lord of all, a father, my eyes are those a slave [looking at] his master's hand,
34 Remove the weight of the handmaid's son's yoke from a wounded heart,
35 Rescue a trembling soul—let me escape from those who oppress me.

36 Strengthen miserable people with downcast eyes,
37 Who rejoice in your abundant glory,
38 Calling out at your gate continually.

39 Rise to my assistance and strengthen me, Your people are diligent in their love, let my refuge be under your wings.

40 Friend, deliver my message! We shall achieve respite and our souls will repose,
41 Among my lords, learned Jews, let us drink and hail each other with the drink of flagons,
42 Praise Him who preserves my life, forgives the sins of the repentant, and shows forbearance,
43 The eternal king, generous, there is no second to Him,

44 His grace is always upon us,
45 He rules everything in His dominion,
46 He spread out the earth and heaven.

47 My eye cannot see him but he sees me. Proclaim his unity, prostrating yourself, and drink the pure earthly cup.

The interweaving of Arabic and Hebrew within individual lines sometimes occurs in Shabazian poetry.[149] Here, for example, verse thirty-one ("we will listen to the melodies and the themes of poetry") contains the Hebrew word "*shir*" in an otherwise Arabic strophe. As in the previous poem, this poem emphasizes the speaker's need (verses twenty-five, twenty-nine, and thirty-two), and, due to the blurring of the personal, the communal, and the metaphysical, the needy state of the Jews and of the human soul. This theme's placement near the end of the poem, along with the wine theme and praise for "my lords, learned Jews" (verse forty-one), suggests as well that the speaker expected some form of payment.

[149] See Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 67–68.

Verses twenty-eight through thirty ("remember our fathers' covenant, fulfill your promise to us, That we may return to our Holy House") provide an example of a very common thematic building block in Shabazian poetry, which I call "Zionistic-apocalyptic." Such statements are Zionistic in that they suggest that the speaker and his people could rectify their plight by returning to their true homeland: Zion. Sometimes this wish for restitution is expressed in personal terms: "I left Zion, my home";[150] "Have mercy on a miserable wretch, whom You exiled to Yemen";[151] "I will behold Mount Zion and my palace on the day that my labors succeed."[152] More often it is communal in nature: "We will return to our land in glory";[153] "We will ascend to Zion and rejoice, beholding beauty in my dwelling places."[154] It often takes the form of a plea for deliverance: "Lady, remember our love—gather the banished tribes…and tell a disgraced people 'Arise and gather!' Their sojourn in Yemen is painful";[155] "Awaken your chosen people and let us ascend to Zion joyfully…O Builder of Zion and the Holy Mountain!";[156] "Gather the scattered [Jews] of Yemen";[157] "You Who gathers [word unclear] gather our tribes—we will be restored in Jerusalem";[158] "He shall assemble his scattered people";[159] "Ascend to a pure land!";[160] "One day we will ascend to the Land of the Gazelle."[161]

According to al-Shabazī's poems, only the upheaval caused by overturning Muslim power would allow a return to Zion: "Revel in your Lord, Who knows the state of the stranger. He may intercede soon on your behalf with a bounteous rain and return your ruined people"; "You

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[150] ST, 104r: "*fāraqt tsiyōn mawṭinī*."
[151] Ibid., 93v: "*raḥem ʿonī daloh vª-temon golªtoh*."
[152] Ibid., 122v: "*arʾeh lª-har tsiyōn vª-armōni / yōm hatsleḥ ʿªmoli*."
[153] Ibid., 135r: "*vª-noshūv lª-artsenū ba-hªdroh*."
[154] Ibid., 126r: "*naʿªlah lª-tsiyōn va-nismªḥoh / ūbimishkªnōtay arʾah sªgullat nª ʾōtay*."
[155] Ibid., 104v: "*zikhri gªvarat ahªvoh / nidḥe shªvoṭim kabªtsi…vāmōr lª-ūmmoh naʿªlvoh / kūmi bª-ḥen hīkovªtsi…mahlokh bª-temon kōʾªvoh.…*"
[156] Ibid., 107v: "*ʿōrªroh ʿam naḥªlotekh / naʿªlah tsiyōn bª-ḥadvoh*," "*yoh bªne tsiyōn vª-harʾel*."
[157] Ibid., 136r: "*vª-kabets pªzūri mi-temon*."
[158] Ibid., 159v: "*yā jāmiʿ al-shaml al-badīd / ijmaʿ li-shaml asbāṭinā* (word unclear) / *bi l-quds jamʿih nastaʿīd.…*"
[159] Ibid., 134r: "*yªkavets pªzūrei ʿamō*."
[160] Ibid., 108r: "*taʿªli arats ṭªhōroh*."
[161] Ibid., 92r: "*yōm naʿªlah arats tsªvi*."

who gives in abundance,[162] release the confused—reach Jerusalem and send the Messiah, the prince of the prophets";[163] "He will assemble us on the day that the son of David comes […] and every exiled prisoner will return."[164] In al-Shabazī's poetry, the return to Zion often accompanies the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the restitution of its sacrificial cult: "Bring us together as of old and rebuild the ruined Temple!";[165] "My goal is to ascend to Zion, just as our fathers were redeemed in the past. I would confess to God by means of a sacrifice."[166] As I have mentioned, the chorus of Temple singers provides the template for the singing of Shabazian poetry itself. The theme becomes apocalyptic in that this singing will occur in the rebuilt Temple at the end of days: "We will sing in the city of Zion. The Holy [Temple] radiates light and the Shrine contains a secret."[167]

The symbolism of Shabazian poetry includes a number of polemical images. In this poem, the "handmaiden" (*shifḥah*) of verse nineteen and the "handmaid's son" (*yillod ammah*) of verse thirty-four refer to Hagar and Ishmael, identified in rabbinic sources as representatives of Islam. Esau/Edom represents Christendom. When the Messiah comes, "Edom's minister [will have] fallen from his throne and the false son of a handmaiden will fall."[168] One poem's protagonist describes himself as "a wretch, oppressed by the son of a stinking handmaiden."[169]

The identification of Ishmael as "a wild ass of a man" (Gen. 16:12) also serves as a springboard for polemic: "the stinking and proud wild ass";[170] "Let the wild ass be overthrown and panicked";[171] "A wild ass, like a dashing horse, humiliates me with his decree";[172] "A bull did violence

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[162] P, 516. "*Muhaymil*" derives from *h.m.l.*'s meaning of "to rain."

[163] Ibid., 71v: "*ludhdh bi-rabbak khuṣṣ ḥāl al-ghᵃrīb / rūbbᵃmā tashfaʿ bi-ghawthin qᵃrīb / wa-tuʿīd qawmak li-annuh hᵃrīb*"…"*yā muhaymel fakk li l-ḥāyirī / ḥad arḍ al-quds ᵃṣal zāyirī / ibʿeth al-mahdī ᵃmīr al-rusūl.*"

[164] Ibid., 164r: "*wᵃ-yijmaʿ shamlᵃnā al-mafrūd / bi-yawm yatī wᵃlad dāwud*"; "*vᵃ-yashūv khol ᵃsir gōlah.*"

[165] Ibid., 111r: "*yajmaʿ lᵃ-shamlī ka l-qᵃdīm / yaʿmur lᵃ-qudsuh al-hᵃdīm.*"

[166] Ibid., 29r: "*murādī yā widdī bi-tsayūn aʿalah / bi-ḥayth kānū l-abā muqīmīn fī kumlā / wᵃ-atwaddā li-lāh bi-qurbān maqbūlā.*"

[167] Ibid., 32r: "*natranan fī ḥuṣn tsayūn / wa l-muqaddas fī al-nūr maḍiyūn / wa l-haykal fih serr maknūn.*"

[168] Ibid., 141r: "*vᵃ-sar ᵃdōm mi-kisʾō nafal / ū-ven omoh sheqer topal.*"

[169] Ibid., 142r: "*vᵃ-dol nidḥoq mi-ben omoh ha-bᵃʾūshoh.*"

[170] Ibid., 129v: "*ū-fara mavʾish bᵃ-gᵃʾavoh.*"

[171] Ibid., 131r: "*vᵃ-yashpīl para vīyhōmem.*"

[172] Ibid., 130r: "*ū-fara ka-sūs dōher bᵃ-dotō yakhlimeni.*"

to me, a wild ass scattered me and siezed that which is precious to me."[173] "Overthrow the haughty wild ass…we are surrounded by strangers, the marauding soldiers of cruel kings."[174] Shabazian poetry—and Yemeni Jewish literature broadly speaking—uses the Hebrew word "*zedim*," "insolent men," to pun on "Zaydīs": "Insolent men…ruled over the humble sons of simplicity".[175]

The following poem illustrates several central themes in al-Shabazī's poetry:

Poem 3 (fols. 120b–121b)

1 In her grace, an awe-inspiring woman musters a holy and treasured people,[176]
2 Each dawn and each evening she gives me recompense,
3 She is my bow and she is my sword and in her my heart is redeemed.
4 She is my cherished and choice one, she leads them to rest throughout their lives.

5 I saw her at Mount Sinai,
6 She increased the light of my eyes,
7 I delighted in my contemplation.

8 I arrived at the limit.

9 I met the dark-skinned gazelle with the long neck, the prince of those who seek esoteric knowledge,
10 He dazzled the assembled people while the angels stood by in their ranks,
11 The letters were assembled there to be seen, sending forth light, one after the other,
12 Moses was watching carefully and the nobles were standing by.

13 He was engulfed in a spiritual light,
14 He left every corporeal thing,
15 He spoke clearly to me about the Torah.

16 On all of its principles.

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[173] Ibid., 122r: "*shor bi ḥ^{a}mas para h^{a}fitsani / lakaḥ maḥmadi*."

[174] Yehudah Ratzhaby, "Le-Toldot ha-maḥloket ʿal ha-kabalah bikhilat tsanʿa bi-shnot 1913–1914," in *Peʿamim* 88 (2001): 104n55; ST, 148r: "*shol^{a}ṭū zedim v^{a}-zallzalīm bivne tōm va-ʿanvoh*."

[175] ST, 136r: "*v^{a}-hashpel para mityaher*"; "*sov^{a}vū ʿolaynū zorīm / g^{a}dūde m^{a}lokhim akhzorim*."

[176] Yosef Tobi has drawn attention to earlier parallels to the structure of this poem in Avraham ben Ḥalfon, *Shirim*, ed. Yosef Tobi (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1991), 71–72.

17 You inspired me to speak, my love, though my body is wasting away,
18 Our separation has grown long—How I miss you!—my grief will not cease,
19 When will we reach Jerusalem[177] and leave our land,
20 Gazing upon the Immortal Garden and every inaccessible place,[178]

21 We will visit the Holy Shrine,
22 And the king, elevated upon his Throne,
23 His light brighter than the sun's,

24 In the days of rejoicing.

25 O Rose, with your living soul gather my scattered ones,
26 Run like a gazelle and bless my might,
27 In your love, seek a holy people that has suffered,
28 My soul, having been exiled, will live again, and my Intellect will advise me.

29 He calls out to my lover's tribes,
30 They ascend together to the End of Days,
31 I believe in his words.

32 I will not sit in mockery.

33 My time in Yemen passes slowly without you, lover.
34 We had a written marriage contract, borne by Moses' hand,
35 Doesn't every sinner repent—Mustn't He forgive them?
36 He who revels in the Eternal will be given freely when he asks.

37 This is the thing I seek,
38 To be a servant to my beloved,
39 That would sweeten my bread and my drink.

40 Obeying His every command.

41 The eloquent Mashtaʾite says—I have become a stranger,
42 I conclude my speech and my melodic patterning in a frightened state,
43 from illnesses and trials, alone, without a lover.

44 O one exalted God, grant us a speedy victory.[179]

45 He controls the gates of joy,
46 He grants whatever He wishes to whomever He chooses,
47 He looks down upon His slave.

48 Let us realize our wishes.

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[177] This word is unclear in the MS. It looks like "*al-qanadī*" or "*al-hindi*." The translation assumes that "*al-qanadī*" is a mistake for "*al-qudsī*."

[178] "*Wa-kull mā nastaḥil*" might also mean something along the lines of "every time we change (incarnation)."

[179] This phrase, "*fatḥun qarīb*," is of Qurʾānic provenance (61:13, 48:18, 27).

Wilhelm Bacher has noticed the importance of the revelation at Sinai—treated here in verses five through sixteen—and *Shavuot*, the festival that commemorates it, in al-Shabazī's corpus of poems.[180] Al-Shabazī uses the Qurʾānic term, "Night of Power" (*laylat al-qadr*) (Q 97:1–3), to describe this holiday.[181] He writes: "On the Night of Power He made himself manifest. I spent the night in His shadow."[182] The Sinaitic tableau recurs with such high frequency that it seems quite unlikely that all poems containing it were composed for the festival of *Shavuot*. These vignettes sometimes describe Moses: "O you who speaks [with God], the son of ʿAmrān, the king of the age."[183] In one poem, the speaker compares good poetic composition to one of the miracles God wrought for Moses: "[A skillful poet] provides the befuddled with a proof, just as Moses struck the rocks and water flowed."[184] Al-Shabazī describes revelation in visual terms: "On the day that Moses went up to the mountain my soul was disturbed, and all of the people were there, gazing towards the voices, luminescent jeweled letters, *alif, bā* and *jīm*, were seen, transparent, lofty, and shining."[185] "The divine messenger delivered an oration at the mountain. Ten commandments were revealed, inscribed precisely upon two tablets. At the mountain flames engulfed the clouds and light encircled the host."[186]

In addition to marking the revelation at Sinai, this poem also contains a thread of lyricism and eroticism that describes its male and female subjects. A general characteristic of al-Shabazī's poetry, these lyrical descriptions of male and female figures link his poetry with the wider tradition of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry.

For example, several of the poems' Hebrew verses describe an enigmatic female figure. She is the "awe-inspiring woman" of Song of Songs 6:4 (*ayumah*) of verses one through six,[187] and the "rose" (*ḥavatselet*)

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[180] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 95.

[181] Ibid., 88.

[182] ST, 90r: "*fī laylat al-qadrī tijallā* (90v) *amsayt bi-ẓilluh sākinī*."

[183] Ibid., 3v: "*yā mukallem walad ʿimrān ant sulṭān al-zᵃmān*."

[184] Ibid., 76r "*wa-yujawweb li-man kān ḥāyer / fī burhān / kayf mūsā ḍarab al-ṣᵃwānī / wājrī al-mā*."

[185] Ibid., 89v: "*fī yawm ṭaleʿ mūsā ilā l-ṭūr / thumm kān rūḥī ḥāyirī / wa l-qawm jamʿah ḥāḍirīn / min telk al-aṣwāt nāẓirīn / aḥruf tunīr mutajawhirīn / min nūr alef bā jīm mashhūr / shafāf ʿālī bāherī*."

[186] Ibid., 166v: "*wa l-nᵃbī al-mursal / khāṭᵃbuh fī l-ṭūr / ʿashar kalimāt anzal / khaṭṭ bi-lawḥayn maḥkūr / wa l-jᵃbal nār yashʿal wa l-ghᵃmāyem wa l-nūr / fī ḥiwāley al-ʿaskar*…."

[187] This epithet also appears in Ibid., 90v, 164v, and 167r.

of verse twenty-five. Al-Shabazī also describes women with a variety of allusive Hebrew epithets: "Bat Galim";[188] "Rose of Sharon" (*ḥavatselet sharonim*);[189] "Rose of the Depths" (*shoshanat ʿamakim*);[190] "myrtle" (*hadasah*);[191] "doe" (*ʿoferah*);[192] "the doe called Bat Sheva" (*ʿofrah niqra bat sheva*);[193] "she-gazelle" (*tsviyah*);[194] "graceful she-gazelle" (*tsviyat ḥen*);[195] "daughter of a nobleman" (*bat nadiv*);[196] "beloved bride" (*raʿayah*);[197] and "young woman" (*ʿalmah*).[198]

Broadly speaking, the erotic lexicon of al-Shabazī's poetry tends to describe the female beloved in Hebrew and the male beloved in Arabic. Nevertheless, since a number of al-Shabazī's poems were likely recited or sung at weddings, Hebrew terms signify the groom as well: "he-gazelle" (*tsvi*);[199] "graceful he-gazelle" (*tsvi ha-ḥen*);[200] or "hart" (*ʿofer*).[201] However, unlike the terse Hebrew epithets used to describe mysterious female figures, al-Shabazī describes the male beloved's body in detail. In verse nine, he describes the "dark-skinned gazelle with the long neck" (*al-ʿawhajī al-akhḍar*). The Arabic epithets that al-Shabazī employed to designate the male beloved are: "having a long neck" (*ʿayṭalī*);[202] "long-necked gazelle" (*ʿawhajī*);[203] "gazelle" (*ghazāl*); "lover" (*khill*);[204] "branch

[188] Ibid., 44v, 110r. Rashi, the medieval biblical commentator, understood the phrase "Bat Galim" in Isaiah 10:30 as a place name from a list of the names of towns conquered by Sennacherib. R. Huna explains (BT Sanhedrin 94v) that this phrase, "the daughter of waves (*galim*)" refers to the People of Israel (*kneset yisraʾel*), whose good deeds are as numerous as waves in the sea. A similar interpretation can be found in the *Zohar* (Noah 63r).
[189] ST, 90r.
[190] Ibid., 141r.
[191] Ibid., 135r.
[192] Ibid., 135v.
[193] Ibid., 166v.
[194] Ibid., 166r.
[195] Ibid., 93r, 111r.
[196] Ibid., 89v, 93r, 129r, 167r.
[197] Ibid., 164v.
[198] Ibid., 102v.
[199] Ibid., 90r, 110r, 135v, 166r.
[200] Ibid., 148v.
[201] Ibid., 90r, 93r.
[202] Ibid., 44r, 92v, 108r.
[203] Ibid., 44v.
[204] Ibid., 92r, 98r.

of the *bān* tree" (*ghuṣn al-bān*);[205] "a doe-eyed gazelle" (*ʿawhajī min al-ḥūr*);[206] or "the prince of the doe-eyed" (*amīr al-ḥūr*).[207]

One remarkable poem in ST provides a full catalog of the attributes of "the prince of the doe-eyed" whom the speaker visits in a paradisaical garden:

> The light of his faceʿ outstrips that of the crescent moon, affixed in the heavens,
> All of the young gazelles are enamored of him,
> His nose is as delicate as a sword's cutting edge,
> He is a skilled youth—I am astounded by his attributes,
> His eyes are a cup of wine that wash over me,
> And mesmerize my recalcitrant heart,
> His lips are like rubies chiseled with the letters *alif*, *ba* and *jīm*,
> His mouth tastes sweet like pomegranates and basil—a cure for every ill,[208]
> His teeth are as lustrous as pearls[209] [text damaged]
> His neck is that of a gazelle who has wandered off, alone, a fugitive, who disturbs all of the gazelles [with his beauty].
> He has amazed all of my brothers and has given me drink,
> I spent the night with him, drunk,
> And he said: "O poet from among the forgetful" [i.e., mankind],
> Wake up! Morning has risen! Speak precisely about my religion,
> And stir the best of minds from their slumber,
> Do not pay attention to the other gazelles, who censure me, for I am like Joseph in beauty.[210]

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[205] Ibid., 50r, 70r.

[206] Ibid., 55v.

[207] Ibid., 50v, 83v. "*Ḥūr al-ʿīn*" is an image used in the Qurʾān to describe the eyes of the beautiful maidens in Paradise which literally means "displaying a sharp contrast between the white of the eye and the dark iris." (I translate it throughout as "doe-eyed").

[208] In his poetic translation of Shabazian poetry, Ratson Halevi translates this word, "*āfāt*" variously as "pain," "plague," or "death." *Shirat Yisraʾel bi-teman*, 1:143, 154, 160, 290.

[209] Compare ST, 98r: "His lips (?) like rubies and his teeth surpass pearls in luster," "*shifāt* (?) *kᵃmā al-yāqūt / wa-asnānuh tᵃfūq al-durr*."

[210] Ibid., 50v–51r: "*shāhadt sīd al-ḥūr bi-rūs al-dūr taqūl subḥān khalāquh / jᵃbīnuh nūrᵃhū ghālib hilāl thāqib / sabī al-ghizlān ʿushshāquh / rᵃqīq al-marʿaf al-bātir / fᵃtā sātir / bᵃlash ʿaqlī bi-akhlāqih / wa l-aʿyān khamr fī l-ṣīnī / tulāhīnī / wa-tuftin khāṭirī al-ʿadhlān / shifātuh tushbih al-yāqūt / bihā manḥūt / alif bā jīm mathlūthāt / wᵃ-thaghruh ʿadhb rumānī wᵃ-rayḥānī / diwā yushfī min al-afāt / thᵃnāyah ṣāfiyah ka l-lūl/ …(51r)… / wᵃ-ʿunquh ʿawhᵃjī shārid hᵃrab fārid / wᵃ-hayyam jamʿat al-ghizlān / bᵃlash kul jamʿat ikhwānī wᵃ-arwānī / wᵃ-amsayt ʿindᵃhu sākir / wa-qāl yā shāʿir al-abyāt min al-ghaflāt / tinabbah ṭalʿat al-bākir / wa-ḥarrik qawlak aftīnī ʿalā dīnī / wa-nᵃbbih ṭībat al-khāṭir / wᵃ-lā tuftin li-ghizlānī bi-ʿudhlānī / bi-ḥusn al-yūsufi al-fattān*."

Several other poems portray the beloved's luminescence. He is "a gazelle from among the doe-eyed who radiates light in all directions."[211] "O pretty one with eyebrows like the letter *nūn*…who looks like the crescent moon, affixed [in the heavens]."[212] His forehead is especially noteworthy in terms of light imagery: "his forehead is like pearls";[213] "A hidden secret is written on his forehead."[214]

The speaker in Poem 3, like the paradigmatic lover of Arabic lyric poetry, wastes away from longing for his remote beloved (verses seventeen and eighteen). Conventional expressions of the emotions of the spurned lover form yet another building block of al-Shabazī's poetry. Take, for example, the following lines: "The beloved left me and turned away";[215] "I have a lover but he is gone and separation from him pains me";[216] "My love, do not forget me. You have oppressed me and your absence has grown long";[217] "Remember your promise";[218] "Time ensnared me with its strategems and I remained a slave to it, but I have a lover in the Upper World from whom I have been separated due to my worries and my bad inclinations."[219] Al-Shabazī only rarely describes the lovers' successful rendezvous: "I lay among tender branches [i.e., young men], astonished, embracing the gazelle who is as slender as a young shoot."[220]

Often the poem's speaker complains of sleeplessness. Given that many, if not most, of al-Shabazī's poems relate the nighttime journey of the soul, freed from the body by sleep to roam the supernal regions, this theme acquires an additional shade of meaning. Though freed from the body, the soul still has a long way to go in its quest for perfection. The following lines exemplify this motif of sleeplessness: "A doe-eyed gazelle left me insomniac, sleep did not touch my eyes during the night;"[221] "O distant gazelle, Being apart from you weighs heavily upon

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[211] Ibid., 55v: "*ʿawhᵃjī min al-ḥūr / bi-ḥawṭah mutawᵃjah nūr*."
[212] Ibid., 70r: "*yā zayn nūnī l-ḥājeb…shibah al-hilāl al-thāqeb*."
[213] Ibid., 50r: "*jᵃʿīduh ka l-luyūl*."
[214] Ibid., 54v: "*wa-fī jᵃbīnuh maktūb serr maḥjūb*."
[215] Ibid., 92r: "*al-khill hājarnī wᵃ-wallā*."
[216] Ibid., 40r: "*lī khill thumma mafqūdā / awḥash ʿᵃlayyā al-tafrīd*."
[217] Ibid., 98v: "*ḥᵃbībī lā tᵃkūn ghāfel / jᵃfayt ḥālī wa-ṭāl hajrakˑ*."
[218] Ibid., 98v–99r: "*wᵃ-yudhkar dhālek al-ʿahd*."
[219] Ibid., 12r: "*shᵃghalnī al-waqt fī makruh / bᵃqayt mamlūk fī ʿaṣruh /wᵃ-lī khill muʿtᵃlī qaṣruh / hᵃjartuh min humūm baṭshī*."
[220] Ibid., 101v: "*asraf bi l-aghṣān* (?)*ʿānaq al-ʿawhajī al-ghuṣn al-ahyaf*."
[221] Ibid., 89v: "*sharrad mᵃnāmī ʿawhᵃjī al-ḥūr / bi l-layl ashar nāẓerī*."

me, My imagination spends the night exhausted, bearing its shame";[222] "Lover, you left me abandoned and sleepless, you turned me over to the mob….";[223] "My eyes stayed open with sleeplessness on the night I spent in your house, among your blooming roses";[224] "Friend, deliver a message on my behalf, Send my greetings to my love, So that he will remember his promise to me. His having left me is a constant affliction, But he still rules over my dreams and distresses my eyes [with insomnia], O my love, I cannot sleep because of you."[225]

Al-Shabazī's poetry often links the theme of the sleepless night to lyrical imagery of birds: "O owl, sing…your voice drives sleep from me";[226] "I cannot sleep, O turtledove";[227] "A turtledove kept me awake in the Upper Garden, so I spent the night singing my own songs."[228] Sometimes the bird, chirping plaintively, represents the distressed human lover, as in the verse, "O Yemeni turtledove, why did you leave your lover?"[229] In other poems, birds are associated with God. For example: "Doves prostrate themselves and sing for him";[230] "Tell me, O dove of the king, where was your ancient nest?"[231]

As the preceding examples show, esoteric symbolism fills al-Shabazī's poetry. As if this were not enough, his poems frequently allude to this tendency. For example: "I have written allegories";[232] "Hear my allegories";[233] "Blessed is He who grants me allegorical poetry."[234] Some of these verses suggest that groups of Jewish scholars would spend time at semi-formal gatherings or even weddings interpreting allegories. The

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[222] Ibid., 13r: "*yā dhā al-ghᵃzāl al-ghāyib / hajrak ʿᵃlayyā thaqal / wāmsī khᵃyālī lāgheb / fī ʿaybᵃhu yatanaqal.*"

[223] Ibid., 90v: "*fāraqtᵃnī yā khill mahjūr / bi l-layl amsī sāhirī / aslamtᵃnī fī yad jumhūr.…*"

[224] Ibid., 70r: "*sharradt ṭarfī mushar / amsayt dākhil dārak / mā bayn ward azhārak.*"

[225] Ibid., 84v: "*yā nᵃdīm balligh li-qaṣdī / bi l-sᵃlām qum khuṣṣ widdī / rūbbᵃmā yadhkur li-ʿᵃhdī / hajrᵃhu dāyem bᵃlānī / wā-ʿᵃdū bi l-sū timᵃlak bi l-mᵃnām ṭarfī shᵃjānī / yā muḥibb sāher min ajlak.*"

[226] Ibid., 66v: "*yā ṭāyir al-būm gharrad…nawmī bi-ṣawtek tashrad.*" Owls also appear in ST fols. 70r, 145r.

[227] Ibid., 148r: "*asharat ʿannī al-nawm yā raʿbūb.*"

[228] Ibid., 121v: "*ṭayr al-ḥᵃmām sharrad li-aʿyānī fī bustān aʿlī / wāmsayt atarannan bi-alḥānī.*"

[229] Ibid., 83v: "*ayᵃhu al-qumrī al-yᵃmānī kayf dhī fāraqt khilak.*"

[230] Ibid., 102v: "*luh taghared ṭuyūr al-ḥᵃmāyem fī sajdah.*"

[231] Ibid., 104r: "*yā ṭāyir al-mulk aftᵃnī / ayn kān wikrak min qᵃdīm.…*"

[232] Ibid., 17r: "*bi l-ramz qad ṣanaft qawlī.*"

[233] Ibid., 84r: "*ismaʿ armāzī.*"

[234] Ibid., 151v: "*subḥāna munṭeq lisānī fī ramz naẓm al-mᵃʿānī.*"

speaker of one poem adjures a friend to drink wine with him "so that we will understand every secret and allegorical interpretation";[235] "The learned man knows the essence of poetry's allegorical messages, One who has such a secret should bring it forward for us to unravel, To put the mind in charge, He [should] ponder the words which I have set forth if he is wise";[236] "God remembers him who is knowledgeable in allegories. He emanates his knowledge, illuminating the stations of the Zodiac, on him who is successful in this regard. All of the learned Jews seek his company and engage in this pursuit."[237]

On the simplest level of its symbolic language, the manner in which Shabazī's poetry frames the encounter with the beloved in a dream vision of Paradise shows that the beloved is an otherworldly being. Also, his poems indicate that the earthly bride and groom possess metaphysical analogues in God and Israel, the Soul and the Intellect. Who is the beloved? Who are the women referred to by the allusive Hebrew epithets? Marginal comments written in ST already indicate that one reader has attempted to decode the poems' symbolism.

One poem in ST compares the beauty of the "long-necked one" (*ʿayṭalī*) to the Messiah (*al-masīḥ*):

> Late at night I enjoy relaxing with a cup [of wine],
> When I recall one with a long neck,
> Whose beauty is like that of the Messiah,
> Tall, with the beauty of a gazelle,
> Honorable and generous,
> A lover of the First Light,
> Who keeps a secret and does not divulge it.[238]

Feminine figures in Shabazī's poetry could also possess theological significance. A poem beginning, "Garb yourself in might, awe-inspiring woman" (*ayumah lovshi ʿozekh*), closely parallels a different poem that reads "Garb yourself in might, immanent presence" (*shekhinah lovshi ʿoz*).[239] Thus, the text itself suggests that the "awe-inspiring woman"

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[235] Ibid., 21v: "*vᵃ-naskil bᵃ-khol sod vᵃ-ṭaʿam rᵃmūz.*"

[236] Ibid., 45r–45v: "*yaʿrif rumūz abyātī fī al-dhātī man kān ʿālmā / min kān luh sirr yātī natafātī / fī ʿaql ḥākimā / yakhtaṣṣ fī ʿkilmātī / bi-ithbātī / in kān fāhimā.*"

[237] Ibid., 76v: "*dhakar allāh man kān ʿālim bi l-armāz fayḍ ʿilmuh yunīr al-maʿālam / dhī bih fāz / jamʿ al-aḥbār ʿinduh tᵃnādim fī ibrāz.…*"

[238] Ibid., 84v: "*ākhar al-layl ṭāb lī ashrab al-kās wᵃ-astᵃrīḥ / ḥīn tadhkart ʿayṭᵃlī / ḥusnᵃhū yushbeh al-mᵃsīḥ / ahwaj al-ḥusn ghᵃzālī / dhū kᵃram kafᵃhū sᵃmīḥ / ʿāsheq al-nūr al-awᵃlī / yaktem al-sirr wᵃ-lā yubīḥ.*"

[239] Ibid., 167r, 134v.

symbolizes the Shekhinah, the kabbalistic *sefirah* embodying God's immanence. Later commentators on al-Shabazī's poetry draw this same conclusion.

Most Yemeni Jews before the twentieth century found that the rich symbolic vocabulary of kabbalah served as a hermeneutic key to Shabazian poetry. This was apparently the poet's intention. In one poem, the speaker advises a companion to consult the *Zohar* and the mystical Torah commentary of Baḥya b. Asher.[240] Uncovering the referents for al-Shabazī's poetic symbolism was likely the purview of the people al-Shabazī called the "rabbis from among the lovers" (*aḥbār al-aḥbāb*); those well-versed in kabbalistic thinking; and perhaps those who were also familiar with Sufi poetry.[241] One might venture to add that such members of the community—whether prominent individuals interested in poetic material for their kabbalistic symposia or male guests at a wedding—in addition to interpreting this poetry, may have been responsible for remunerating the poet.

Shabazian poetry must have appealed to less academic tastes. Using the motifs of Arabic lyric poetry may well have served as a useful way of popularizing kabbalistic ideas, still relatively new to Yemen. The music to which the poems were set likely appealed to a wider audience.[242] On the basis of this evidence, the well-known ban on musical instruments that Jews in twentieth-century Ṣanʿāʾ observed seems not to have been observed by Jews in Lower Yemen during this period. Also, although the very allusiveness of al-Shabazī's poetry gives the impression of profundity, some allegorical readings may emerge from the poems, even to readers not grounded in kabbalistic theosophy. Lyrical Arabic strophes were presumably accessible to the vast majority of listeners. Nevertheless, when the scholar A.Z. Idelsohn asked some Yemeni Jews in Jerusalem in the first decade of the twentieth century to perform music for him to record, their rabbi permitted them to perform

[240] Ibid., 111r. Bacher also found numerous examples of poems by al-Shabazī that reference the *Zohar* and Baḥya. *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 17, 84n5, 85n2, 139.

[241] ST, 90r.

[242] It is not entirely clear that the term "*laḥn*," common in al-Shabazī's poetry, refers to musical composition (Ibid., 65r, 77r, 162v). However, other references to music and musical instruments as a theme (see for example Ibid., 102v–103r, 157v, 158r) seem to indicate that it played a part in the poetry's performance.

"prayers and passages from the Hebrew Bible," but not passages from the Hebrew-Arabic *shirot*, which contained kabbalistic mysteries.[243]

If Muslim *ḥumaynī* poetry is a key chapter in the story of al-Shabazī and Shabazian poetry, is the opposite the case? In offering an answer to this question, it should be stated at the outset that no Yemeni Muslim writer (with one twentieth-century exception to be discussed in Chapter Seven) has ever considered Jewish Yemeni poetry a part, integral or not, of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. This can be attributed largely to ignorance of the subject. Given the clear formal and thematic affinities between Muslim *ḥumaynī* poetry and Shabazian poetry, the two corpora are historically connected. From the perspective of the aesthetics of *ḥumaynī* verse, Shabazian poetry offers a perspective on the issue of linguistic code-switching. By alternating strophes of Hebrew and Arabic, the sacred and the profane, Shabazian poetry may prove a mystical counterpoint to the code-switching of Muslim *ḥumaynī* poetry. It is ironic that while Zaydī Muslims in north Yemen felt the need to downplay the mystical symbolism of *ḥumaynī* poetry in order for it to become a suitable poetic form, Jews in Lower Yemen amplified and expanded this facet of its poetics. For them, the complex symbolic vocabulary of the kabbalah became a hermeneutic code for understanding the mysteries of Shabazian poetry and, by extension, *ḥumaynī* poetry as a whole.

Conclusion

The historical R. Sālim al-Shabazī was a learned man from a village in Lower Yemen who may have supported himself by composing poems for special occasions and by practicing geomancy. The form that dominated Yemeni Jewish poetry from the seventeenth century onwards is so closely identified with him as to be called "Shabazian." The theory that this poetic form developed as a response to influences from developments in the wider Jewish world, particularly Safed, rests on shaky evidence. Rather, al-Shabazī's poetry drew upon the themes, motifs (and possibly musical arrangement) of contemporary Yemeni Sufi poetry, combining it with kabbalistic Hebrew phrasings to create a new art

[243] A.Z. Idelsohn, "Mi-ḥaye ha-temanim birushalayim," in *Shay shel sifrut* (October 18, 1918), 16, reprinted in Nurith Govrin, *Shay shel sifrut* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1973).

form. It also adopted some of the conventions of the tribal poetry of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in its view of poetic inspiration.

Al-Shabazī's *shirot* display the formal characteristics of the *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥ*. In these compositions, a number of motifs—such as the dream-vision of Paradise and the theophany at Sinai, the Zionistic-apocalyptic theme, and anti-Muslim polemic—recur again and again. Bacchism, lyricism, and eroticism play major roles as well. The theme of esotericism makes clear that al-Shabazī believed his poetry to possess additional levels of signification.

CHAPTER SIX

SHABAZIAN EROTICISM, KABBALAH AND *DOR DEʿAH*

The Spring and the Snake

The "Mawzaʿ exile" of 1679–1680 had far-reaching effects on the Jews of Yemen. Many Jews perished traveling to Mawzaʿ; others died from the abysmal conditions there. After a year, the Imām rescinded his order of expulsion because he could not find any place to send them.[1] Jews were allowed to leave Mawzaʿ, but they had to settle in new neighborhoods outside of the major towns, having lost much of their property, including their manuscripts.

The poetry of R. Sālim al-Shabazī expressed many of the sentiments of this community, especially its desire for messianic redemption. His poetry quickly spread from circles of Lower Yemeni Jews to all of Yemeni Jewry, in part through the newly developed *dīwān*, an anthology of poems, many of which al-Shabazī wrote. Some scholars have drawn the plausible conclusion that Jews distanced themselves from all things Arabic against the background of their newly exacerbated relations with the Muslim population.[2] Jewish residents of the larger towns of the North, like Ṣanʿāʾ, now living in the new *Qāʿ al-yahūd* ("the sunken area of the Jews") outside the city walls, probably also took a less tolerant view towards Jews and Muslims mingling socially than did their brethren in the villages of the South. Due to one or both of these factors, the "Arabness" of Shabazian poetry became a recurring topic of controversy from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

As we have seen, al-Shabazī's Arabic and bilingual verse often makes use of the erotic themes and imagery of love poetry. Therefore, many Jewish scholars saw the problem of the poetry's Arabness linked to the problem of its sensuality. What distinguished the poetry of the great sage and mystic al-Shabazī from popular love songs that came from the coffeehouses and sitting rooms of Muslim Yemenis? In answering

[1] Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 120.
[2] Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 16; Tobi, "Ḥikuy u-makor," 36–37.

this question, most commentators had recourse to a theory of strict allegorical interpretation. According to the allegorical interpretation, sensual images did not have two levels of meaning—one corporeal and one transcendent; rather, the image only expressed a theological truth. To think that it was sensual in a literal sense, even for a moment, was a grievous error with potentially disastrous implications for an individual and for the community.

In *Sefer Even Sapir*, a popular travelogue among Eastern European Jews in the nineteenth century, R. Yaʿakov Sapir describes the process by which a sick person sought healing at R. Sālim al-Shabazī's tomb in Taʿizz:

> If the sick man fears God and believes in the wonder-working Rabbi, then after he has prayed by the grave he should go into the cave to wash in the *mikveh* and take some of the water. If he deserves to recover, he will find the spring flowing, and an amulet written on a leaf bobbing in the water, which he must take and then he will recover. But if he is not a God-fearing man and does not deserve to recover, then he will find the spring dry and a snake curled in the doorway…[3]

This description of al-Shabazī's power as a life-saving cure to the pious and a mortal danger to the impious, is also an appropriate metaphor for his poetry. Its "outspoken reticence," to borrow a phrase from Jon Whitman, tempted later generations of Jewish scholars to lay bare the secrets of al-Shabazī's poetry. This temptation was as great as that posed by its sensuous imagery.[4] In Whitman's formulation, allegorical writing is by nature at odds with itself; it simultaneously proclaims both the distance and the proximity between language and meaning. Whereas al-Shabazī seems to have thought that hinting about the mystical symbolism of his verse would suffice, a series of nineteenth-century exegetes, unsatisfied with these mere hints, took it upon themselves to decipher al-Shabazī's symbols systematically and at great length.

Whether they intended it or not, these scholars, the most prominent of whom, in my estimation, was R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ (1840–1881), managed to harmonize (or at least integrate) the imagery of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry with kabbalistic theosophy. In order to show this process at work, I will discuss in this chapter the comments on the Arabic lyric

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[3] *Sefer Even Sapir*, 82; Translation from Yaakov Lavon, trans., *My Footsteps Echo: The Yemen Journal of Rabbi Yaakov Sapir* (Israel: Targum Press, 1997), 153.

[4] Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2.

portions of al-Shabazī's poetry that R. Qoraḥ writes in his, the most sophisticated of kabbalistic commentaries, the *Maskil shir yedidut* and *Maskil ʿal neginot*.[5]

However ornate its structure of textual referents, many Jews understood that much of al-Shabazī's poetry was readily accessible to most Yemenis. When it came to erotic passages, this accessibility was not always viewed in a positive light. Scholars' repeated complaints that Jews understood Shabazian poetry's sensual images literally show that they were never entirely successful in imposing strict allegorical interpretation on the community. At the turn of the twentieth century, a movement of Jewish reform called "*Dor Deʿah*" arose in Yemen under the leadership of R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ (1849–1932). Sensual poetic language was one of the problems they sought to combat.

Dor Deʿah members (called *darādiʿ* in Yemeni Arabic), whether influenced by the European Jewish Haskalah, Ottoman liberalism, or local Muslim reformers, sought to purge Yemeni Judaism of the kabbalah, a radical agenda given the centrality of Jewish mysticism among Yemeni Jews. A significant facet of their critique of kabbalah consisted in a rejection of anthropomorphic language. This had implications, not only for works of Jewish mystical literature—foremost among them the *Zohar*—, but for Shabazian poetry as well. At least one *dardaʿī*, R. Raḍāʾ (Ratson) Ṣārūm (1879–1970), is said to have reached the conclusion that Shabazian poetry was simply a pretext for ostensibly pious Jews to become sexually aroused; it was a waste of time. While this attitude was dismissive, it can also be seen as an attempt to restore Shabazian poetry's character as poetry; that is to say, it was a waste of time in the same sense that busying oneself with any poetry was a waste of time.

After having familiarized the reader with R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's exegesis of the lyric imagery of Shabazian poetry, I will turn to the controversies over erotic language that emerge in the introductions to the *Dīwān* and in the writings connected with the *Dor Deʿah* movement. I aim to accomplish two goals in this chapter: explaining the kabbalistic exegesis of Shabazian poetry as exemplified by Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's commentaries and contrasting it with the subsequent reinterpretation of the tradition by

[5] The nineteenth-century commentary on the *Dīwān* by R. David al-Jamal—printed in Yehudah Levi Naḥum, *Sefer ha-teʿudah mi-ḥasifat ginze teman* (Ḥolon: Afikim, 1996)—contains interesting details, including the attribution of interpretations to individual Yemeni rabbis. R. ʿAmram Qoraḥ's "Maidens of Verse" (*ʿAlmot shir*) seems to be largely an abridgement of his father Yaḥyā's work.

Dor Deʿah. Kabbalistic thought, for the purposes of this chapter, can be defined as a symbolic system of thought premised on the divine potencies (*sefirot*). Philosophy, particularly as represented by *Dor Deʿah*, seeks to harmonize the peripatetic tradition with Jewish practice.

My focus is on questions of interpretation revolving around Shabazian poetry's erotic imagery, since this theme includes such a great deal of Shabazian allegory. Allusive Hebrew epithets like "awe-inspiring woman" (*ayumah*) and "Bat Galim" by themselves call for a listener's grounding in the Hebrew language and in kabbalistic texts. In contrast, the motifs of love poetry would have been readily comprehensible to an Arabophone audience. Paradoxically, the clarity of these motifs' language demanded greater interpretive efforts from the listener. For erotic phrases to mean what they ostensibly meant would have reduced the work of the community's hero, R. Sālim al-Shabazī, to the level of triviality. Therefore, while Jewish scholars struggled to explain the metaphysical referents of corporeal imagery, they also knew that accessible corporeal images contributed to the enduring popularity of the genre.

For some, erotic language that hinted at metaphysical meaning was the distinguishing trait of Sālim al-Shabazī's poetry. The first time any of his poetry appeared in print was in a book, *Pizmonim*, published in 1856 by Eleʿazer b. Aharon ʿIrāqī of Calcutta. In the forward, ʿIrāqī says that he chose to include the poems because their strong and frequent anthropomorphic expressions enclose deep mystical meanings.[6]

The topic of the sensual imagery in Shabazian poetry is the most immediately relevant to the broader history of *ḥumaynī* poetry, because both Arab and Jewish poems share the same lexicon of sensual motifs. This theme sheds light on the ways in which Jews, the premier minority in Yemen, appropriated and often radically reworked the *ḥumaynī* tradition. It also shows their often ambivalent attitudes towards Arabs and Yemeni Arab culture. Finally, the theological and metaphysical concerns raised by the Jewish exegetes of Shabazian poetry and its critics among *Dor Deʿah* reformers represent some of the most profound discussions of the language and meaning of *ḥumaynī* verse to be found.

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[6] Abraham Geiger, "Ein hebräisches Buch aus Calcutta," in *Jüdische Zeitschrift* 9 (1871): 275–282; Adolf Neubauer, "Eine Seltene poetanische Sammlung," in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 19 (1870): 309; Wilhelm Bacher, "Les Poésies Inédites d'Israel Nadjara," in *Revue des etudes juives* 59 (1910): 102–103; Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 49–50.

One of the most discussed symbols of this poetry is the "she-gazelle." R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ flatly states that the lovely "she-gazelle" (*ẓabyah*) mentioned in one poem was the *Shekhinah*—that last, resolutely female, phase or potency (*sefirah*) in the progressive manifestation of the Divine that is "the presence and immanence of God in the whole of creation."[7] It may be the case that for Qoraḥ and many other Yemeni Jews, the "she-gazelle" in the song of a performer at a Muslim *qāt* chew, wedding, or Sufi vigil, was, in fact, the *Shekhinah*. After all, a similar perception of harmony between Arabic love poetry and kabbalistic thinking may have motivated the earliest writers in the Shabazian school of poetry to incorporate Sufi verse into their compositions.

Esoteric Interpretation: Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's Commentaries on the Dīwān

Several modes of interpretation distinguish Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's commentaries on the *Dīwān* (they are printed in the margins of the 1931–2/1968 *Dīwān Ḥafets ḥayim*—henceforth abbreviated "HH").[8] On one level, Qoraḥ's commentaries mark the first study of Yemeni Jewish poetry (and Yemeni poetry for that matter) from a critical outlook.[9] He sought out accurate manuscripts.[10] He endeavored to describe the musical arrangements of Shabazian poetry accurately. For comparative purposes, he spent several days, accompanied by his son, ʿAmram, the future leader of the Yemeni Jewish community, in attendance at Muslim celebrations that featured the musical performance of poetry.[11]

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[7] HH, 174; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 216, 229–230.

[8] The texts of the introductions to, and commentaries upon, the *Dīwān* have not been critically edited and the various versions differ considerably. In an article on the *dīwān* commentaries, Yosef Tobi states that a copy of the *dīwān*, with its commentaries, in the collection of the rabbinical school in Cincinnati, was the most recent manuscript. This manuscript, the work of the Ṣanʿānī-Jerusalemite Avraham al-Naddāf, was, in Tobi's estimation, the possible source from which the printed edition used in this chapter drew. Yosef Tobi, "Perushehem shel R. Yaḥyā Koraḥ ve-shel R. Shalom al-Sheykh le-shir ʿahavat yom shabat' le-R. Sh. Shabazi," in *Le-Zekher Ha-R. Shalom Kalzān*, ed. Shimʿon Graydi (Jerusalem: Ha-Vaʿad ha-klali likhilat ha-temanim birushalayim, 1982), 58.

[9] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 104.

[10] HH, 13 (Intro.).

[11] Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 10; Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies*, 1:12. This detail is not included in the version of Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's *Dīwān* introduction in either edition of HH.

Yaḥyā Qoraḥ pays special attention to glossing Arabic words, many of whose meanings seem to have become obscured over time. He makes comments on stylistic attributes of al-Shabazī's poetry, noting the convention of the acrostic and the presence of poetic licenses taken for metrical reasons.[12] Qoraḥ notes shifts in poetic speakers.[13] "It is R. Shabazī's way to skip from one topic to another" he writes.[14] He explains a number of motifs as "figures of speech" (*shiʿur ha-leshon*). Some poetic themes, notably the image of the lover's eyes shooting arrows, he describes as being beloved by poets.[15]

Qoraḥ also historicizes Sālim al-Shabazī to some degree, noting that the *Zohar* was relatively unknown during the time in which the great poet wrote.[16] He brings astronomy,[17] "the science of the spheres" (*hokhmat ha-galgal*),[18] medicine,[19] and philosophy[20] to bear in interpreting al-Shabazī's poetry. Qoraḥ also consults standard Rabbinic works (Talmud and *midrash*). Works of kabbalah, especially the *Zohar* and R. Yosef Gikatila's *Shaʿare orah*, must have become well-worn in the course of his exegetical work. Notwithstanding the scholarly aspects of Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's work, the primary goal of his commentaries is decoding the esoteric symbolism of al-Shabazī's poetry. Occasionally, he uses parables to explain poems. For example, he likens the soul's ascent to the Upper World during the body's slumber to a princess, who, returning to her father's palace, tells him of her husband's wicked deeds.[21]

In treating al-Shabazī's poetry as a symbol-laden sacred text, commentators like Qoraḥ follow clues planted in the poems themselves. One poem, absent from ST, contains the following line: "I have not wasted my verse in composing love poems, My poems are intended for both learned and simple men" (*lam aṣrif niẓāmī bi l-ghazal / shā-aqṣud ahl*

[12] HH, 336, 73.
[13] Ibid., 3, 364.
[14] Ibid., 430.
[15] Ibid., 172, 332.
[16] Ibid., 1. It was his son ʿAmram, however, who concluded that al-Shabazī was unfamiliar with the "new kabbalah" of Safed (HH, 12n10). R. Yaḥyā often used the writings of Isaac Luria and other Lurianic thinkers as sources for interpreting al-Shabazī's poetry (HH 1n10, 29n18, 85, 155, 157, 238, 480).
[17] Ibid., 167.
[18] Ibid., 435.
[19] Ibid., 138, 191.
[20] Ibid., 254, 448. Qoraḥ also made numerous references to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and Yosef Albo's *Sefer Ha-ʿIkarim*.
[21] Ibid., 163.

al-maʿānī wa l-ʿawāmm).[22] On a verse specifically treating allegorical language, he writes: "He named knowledge with the names of lover and beloved, He named them names that would suit the masses" (*laqab al-ʿilm bi-ʿāshiq wa-maʿshūq / fī ismā, laqabuh fī rumūzin lahā lawq / bi l-ʿāmmah*).[23] "[God] has provided allegorical epithets that possess relevance to broader principles," Qoraḥ explains. "As the kabbalists say: each man should go his own way, for the view of one is not the view of another—there are many sides [to everything]."[24] Elsewhere, Qoraḥ describes al-Shabazī's language in general terms, writing:

> Our teacher R. Shalom Shabazi, along with the other writers of poetry, who knew the true wisdom [i.e., kabbalah], gave epithets that were known to uneducated people to well-known esoteric matters in order to open up their ears to the degree that they are able to hear…[25]

Here, Qoraḥ points out the essential paradox of the erotic language of Shabazian poetry: it was readily comprehensible in a literal sense. Yet such understanding was actually a gross misunderstanding. These images would ideally draw the listener in to their true esoteric signification, a signification whose importance was magnified by the very real threat of accidentally understanding sensual language literally.

Wine drinking intensified the tensions between corporeal and spiritual, exoteric and esoteric, sinful and praiseworthy, and vulgar and enlightened, that marks Shabazian poetry. This becomes clear from Qoraḥ's exegesis of an Arabic strophe on wine, which follows:

> At the end of the night I happened upon a transparent glass from Aleppo,
> A decorated glass, filled with a vintage wine, covered,
> Of a pure red hue, as if cut from a flawless gem,
> Like a flash of lightning, shining like gold.
>
> When the cup is passed around,
> With the drink inside it shining forth,
> A man's mind is captured—he becomes like a prisoner.

[22] Ibid., 171.
[23] Ibid., 182.
[24] Ibid., 182–183n25.
[25] Ibid., 256. The comment relates to the poem "*bariq burayq al-naʿām min fawq rawshān ʿajīb*"—The commentator R. David al-Jamal (1824–1877) likened the language of Shabazian poetry to fruit that possessed a peel to protect it. Naḥum, *Sefer ha-teʿudah*, 244.

> It relieves the oppressed and the feverish from illnesses and misfortunes,
> It causes the body to become covered with sweat, washing away worries and fatigue.[26]

The reference to Syrian geography—probably a *khamriyyah* motif going back to Abū Nuwās or earlier—triggered an interesting homily from Qoraḥ, who equated Aleppo with the biblical Aram Tsovah. The phrase, "at the end of the night" (*ākhir al-layl*), opens a number of Shabazian poems and it is usually glossed "at the end of the Exile." Because Aleppo is "the land that David conquered," its use in the poem "refers allegorically to the kingdom of the House of David, a cup of blessing that will be taken up in the future, as it is written: 'I raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the name of the LORD' " (Psalms 116:13).[27] Not only that, but it also "refers allegorically to what is written in *[Sefer] Ḥemdat Yamim* that points to the fact that this refers to the *Shekhinah*, our mother Rachel, who is called the "cup of deliverance."[28]

In the *Zohar*, wine symbolizes the *sefirah* of *Binah*. Qoraḥ makes this association as well.[29] "Wine" and "secret" are also the same numerologically.[30] "Wine drinking is good for learned men for it illuminates their minds with Torah," Qoraḥ writes:[31]

> When they sit and drink wine and the cup goes around from the hand of the wine steward to them, stand among them and they will teach you from among their teachings, as it is said: "wine goes in and a secret comes out" (*nikhnes yayin yetseʾ sod*) […] But ignorant men have light minds and they are led to error and to sin by their drunkenness. There are those who drink with pure and perfect minds and there are those whom wine makes rebellious, doing wicked things and giving no regard to harming others. Decide that your intellect will guide you before wine makes you drunk or decide, if you know that you will become ugly or that you will sin in your drunkenness, not to drink too much. Know what happened to Lot and his sin and that he brought forth two bastard nations into the world.…[32]

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[26] HH, 155.
[27] Ibid., 155n2.
[28] See also Ibid., 585.
[29] Ibid., 156n4.
[30] Ibid., 156n17.
[31] Ibid., 156n22.
[32] Ibid., nn23–28. R. David al-Jamal wrote: "Wine is an allegory for secrets, for not every man is a fit wine-drinker. Only he whose mind is strong will not be harmed by it. Bread is an allegory for the exoteric meaning (*pshaṭ*) of the Torah, which is nourishment for every body. Wine is not taken until after a man is satisfied with bread. One who is foolish and lacks understanding crosses his [natural] barrier and, taking things

Since the consumption of wine would have marked the sorts of Jewish gatherings at which Shabazian poetry was performed, the impact of drinking on the quality of interpretation should be kept in mind when approaching the interpretive issues surrounding the sensual language of Shabazian poetry.

Qoraḥ's understanding of the double-edged quality of alcohol is, on one hand, rooted in classical Jewish sources on drinking. This view also accords with an aspect of wine drinking in Islam. In his *Commentary on Plato's Laws*, the philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. *circa* 950) quotes Plato as saying that the lawgiver should be akin to one who can drink at a symposium and stay sober.[33] While al-Fārābī qualifies Plato's discussion with "akin" ("*mithlu*"), the sentiment found here corresponds to that expressed by the libertine poet Abū Nuwās in several of his poems. In one of his poems, the speaker "see[s] that wine […] enhances the folly of people but leaves the character of noble men intact." In another piece, this poet says, "I have found that those with the least intelligence when they are drunk are the ones with the least intelligence when they are sober."[34]

Even a knowledgeable reader, fortified with kabbalistic texts and wine, might misinterpret Shabazian poetry. Reading Qoraḥ's commentary and other commentaries on al-Shabazī's poetry, one is struck by the polysemous character of the images. A given symbol does not denote one thing consistently; it can mean several different things and, as Qoraḥ notes above, can mean different things to different individuals. For example, Qoraḥ interprets the verdant garden of al-Shabazī's poetry in several ways. It is the Land of Israel[35] or, more often, the garden where the righteous go after death. Glossing the word "Paradise" (*firdaws*), Qoraḥ writes: "This is the garden where souls return to luxuriate in the world to come or [where souls return] every night while

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in their exoteric sense, takes wine before bread. […] The Torah calls such people men who lacked intelligence (*ḥasrei lev*) and says to them "come, eat my food, And drink the wine that I have mixed" (Prov. 9:5) because the exoteric aspects of the Torah also require the priority of that which is appropriate to be first, and the posteriority of that which should come afterwards—this is all the more true of the secrets of the Torah." Naḥum, *Sefer ha-teʿudah*, 250–251.

[33] Al-Fārābī, "Le Sommaire du Livre des 'Lois' de Platon," ed. Therese-Anne Druart, in *Bulletin D'etudes Orientales* 50 (1998): 128.

[34] Philip F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry: Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1997), 214.

[35] HH, 4n11.

sleeping."[36] He explains that "*rawḍat ʿadnān*" is "the Garden of Eden, a place where the light of the *Shekhinah* is found and in which springs and all manner of delightful things are, along with angels. . . ."[37] Along these lines, flowers connote the souls of the righteous and watering or picking them means the emanation of God's blessings.[38] In a general sense, the four rivers of Paradise serve as a synecdoche for the broader emanatory system of Zoharic kabbalah. In addition, they each represent specific archangels and *sefirot*.[39] The arrangement of the aromatic vegetation and other physical features of the garden in one case show the arrangement of the *sefirot*.[40]

In discussing birds, Qoraḥ moves seamlessly between literal and symbolic hermeneutic strategies, bridging an Arabic lived reality and a Hebrew and Aramaic textual world. He writes, "*jawnī* is a kind of partridge with a black belly and black wings. It is an epithet for the Congregation of Israel, who, in its exile, is like a bird fluttering up from the reeds."[41] In some cases, Qoraḥ entangles the literal and allegorical levels of interpretation, offering unusual linguistic explanations in order to reach a particular exegetical conclusion. For example, he understands the word "nightingale" in "I enjoyed the companionship of the nightingale of the *bān* tree in the garden" (*nādamt dhā qumrī al-bān fī l-bustān*) as deriving from "moon" (*qamar*) and "*bān*" as deriving from its meaning of "thought." It strains credulity to think that Qoraḥ could have been unaware of the literal meaning of the poetic cliché "nightingale of the *bān* tree." In order to reach an understanding of the phrase that accorded with a specific kabbalistic idea about the actions of souls in the Garden of Eden, Qoraḥ understands "*qumri al-bān*" ("*qamarī al-bān*") to mean something along the lines of "a luminous and thinking being."[42]

In places where al-Shabazī uses identifiably Muslim vocabulary, one finds more examples of Qoraḥ's esoteric commentary. He explains that the word, "*shaʿbān*," in the phrase, "*qamar shaʿbān,*" "does not designate the month of Shaʿbān as it is known among the Ishmaelites;

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[36] Ibid., 335: "*ve-hu pardes she-ha-nafashot ḥozrot lehitʿaden sham ba-olam ha-baʾ o bi-khol laylah be-ʿet ha-shenah*."
[37] Ibid., 469–470.
[38] Ibid., 251, 322n30.
[39] Ibid., 11n2, 300.
[40] Ibid., 408.
[41] Ibid., 321.
[42] Ibid., 479–480.

rather, a nation is called "*shaʿb*" in the Arabic language." He continues: "This means that the moon is connected to the holy nation of Israel, for it is our star."[43] On the phrase, "may I be protected by Sūrat *Yā Sīn* to ward off abandonment by my lover" (*yā sīn min hajr al-muḥibb*),[44] Qoraḥ comments:

> It means may God ward off my being abandoned by my beloved. I was astonished by this thing because there have been those from here and there who have said to me—in this way you transgress the dictum "the names of foreign gods you should not mention" (Ex. 23:13) for it was one of the ways of the Ishmaelites to say this when someone was hurt. Many of our people learned [this] from them. I gained the confidence of one of their learned men and listened to him until I was able to ask him the meaning of this name. He told me that it was a name of the crazy man (may his name be erased) [Muḥammad].[45] I said to him: "what is the nature of this name?" He told me that this name was a descriptive term and that he had seventy such names like *yā sīn*, *ṭāhā* and others and that it was not just the case for him but also for Moses (our teacher, peace be upon him) and all ten prophets who lived in the world before the coming of their faith. From what he said I learned the merit [we gain] in saying this name, for it is possible that it is a holy name that includes within it the seventy names of the Holy One, blessed be He, that are included in the *Letters of Rabbi ʿAkiva*, meaning that *yā sīn* equals *yod samekh* or refers to another of the holy names that add up to this number…[46]

In the above anecdote, a Muslim scholar paradoxically provides the Jewish exegete with the information he needs—in this case a numerological insight—to divest the symbol of its parochial Muslim connotation.

Qoraḥ furnishes the themes (the sleepless night, separation from the beloved) and dramatis personae (slanderer, messenger) of lyric poetry with national, metaphysical (in reference to the soul's place in an emanational system), and sefirotic interpretations. He anchors the theme of the lovers' union in the wedding ritual, explaining the cosmic implications of the couple's marriage. Their union, as symbolically portrayed in al-Shabazī's poetry, represents God's love for his bride, Israel,[47] the

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[43] Ibid., 212. The Congregation of Israel (*Kneset yisraʾel*), the moon, and wine, were symbols identified with the tenth *sefirah*: *Shekhinah*.

[44] R.B. Serjeant wrote: "*Yā-Sīn* is a favourite *sūrah* to recite against the evil eye." Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 313n35.

[45] R. Qoraḥ makes other references to Muḥammad in polemical contexts. (HH, 15n11, 137).

[46] HH, 336.

[47] Ibid., 296.

giving of the Torah or the two tablets of the law themselves,[48] the process of emanation,[49] the soul and the intellect,[50] the sun and the moon,[51] and the creatures that serve God in heaven.[52] The wedding ritual, in turn, produced positive consequences in the supernal realm.[53]

If, as Scholem writes, Lurianic theosophical doctrines "undoubtedly represent the greatest victory which anthropomorphic thought has ever won in the history of Jewish mysticism," commentators like Qoraḥ found especially rich material in Shabazian poetry's description of the beloved's physical attributes. Not surprisingly, the sefirotic tree, often conceptualized as the mystical *anthropos* (*Adam Kadmon*), provided a ready allegorical key.

For Qoraḥ, the features of the beloved's body symbolize the features and processes of the Divine. He writes: "[Al-Shabazī] mentions four places: the hair, the mouth, the eyes, and the soles of the feet. These symbolize the four worlds and they draw forth His light into them.…";[54] and, "[Al-Shabazī] begins speaking praises of God in the language of [describing] a comely and beautiful young man with a lovely appearance."[55] The *direction* of description was itself a topic invested with great significance. "[Al-Shabazī] begins his prayers and his praises from top to bottom," writes Qoraḥ, "beginning with [the beloved's] head, of fine gold, and moving all of the way down to his ankles—this is according to his desire to bring the *Shekhinah* down from the Upper World to the Lower World."[56]

The immanence of the female *Shekhinah* within the figurative young man draws our attention to kabbalistic thought's penchant for exploring the feminine aspects of the Divine, the intermingling of masculine and feminine, and the topic of sex. Here the male, female, or androgynous beloved described in the Arabic verses serves as a springboard for such discussions. Explaining a poem that contains descriptions of both male and female figures, Qoraḥ says that the phrase, "O long-necked gazelle from among the gazelles" (*yā ʿawhaji al-ghizlān*), refers to Rachel, the

[48] Ibid., 296, 365, 430.
[49] Ibid., 338.
[50] Ibid., 139.
[51] Ibid., 296, 433.
[52] Ibid., 201, 296.
[53] Ibid., 186, 434.
[54] Ibid., 171n21.
[55] Ibid., 171n21.
[56] Ibid., 331n6.

biblical figure identified with the *Shekhinah*. Arabic love poetry uses the masculine to refer to a female beloved, whether out of metrical necessity, or to preserve her modesty, or for ambiguous effect. Qoraḥ explains this convention kabbalistically. He says that the masculine is used to refer to emanation from above. Therefore, any element of the sefirotic system that emanates upon another must be described in the masculine. Poetry also uses the masculine "to distance itself from ugliness, so that it is not imagined to be erotic poetry (*shire ha-ʿagavim*) that leads man into sin and stimulates wicked urges."[57] At other times, the beloved's effeminate character may be explained with reference to God's feminine guises: "[The poets] say 'doe-eyed maiden of the Garden' (*ḥūrī al-janānī*) because God clothes himself as a woman—this is called the Garden and He illuminates it."[58]

Qoraḥ comments a great deal on the beloved's hair, the first of what he called the "four places." Hair, usually referred to by the colloquial "*jaʿd*" or "*jaʿīd,*" derives from the classical "*jaʿada—yajʿudu*" meaning "to be curly." But curls are not only etymologically significant; in the *Zohar*, the emanational system is likened to the curls of a beard.[59] Curls also represent the channels of influence between the *sefirot*. Qoraḥ comments on the verse, "His hair is like a spring of living water" (*wa-jaʿduh ka-ʿayn al-ḥayāh*), by saying: "The tresses of his hair are channels of water that emanate light like a spring of living water—this is what is meant by 'his locks are curled'" (Song Sol. 5:11).[60]

If the hair is likened to gold, the beloved is a woman; if the hair is black, it is a man. This distinction is also rooted in a kabbalistic concept. On the verse, "O you whose hair is black as night" (*yā man jaʿīdak ka l-ẓalām*), Qoraḥ writes:

> This is the secret of "black as a raven" (Song Sol. 5:11) for it is known that the *Zeʾir Anpin* has black hair and in the feminine form (*nukba*) the hair is red. This is the secret of "the locks of your head are like purple" (Song of Sol. 7:6). In the *Arikh Anpin* the hair is white. This is the secret of "and the hair of His head was like lamb's wool" (Dan. 7:9) meaning that it is white. This is the secret of the *sefirot* that together constitute

[57] Ibid., 212.
[58] Ibid., 210n1.
[59] Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein (1949; repr. Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 1:334n264.
[60] HH, 405.

> [the secret of the] "tamarisk" (*eshel*): red, black and white, from the lowest to the highest.[61]

Here Qoraḥ identifies three configurations of the Godhead: the *Arikh Anpin*, the *Zeʾir Anpin*, and the "feminine form." *Arikh Anpin* ("the forebearing one" or "long face") is the highest mystical form of the Divine, depicted as an old man.[62] *Zeʾir Anpin* ("Impatient One" or "short face") is the combination of *sefirot* from *Ḥokhmah* down.[63] This includes justice (*Din*), also the source of evil in the world. Its feminine counterpart is the *Shekhinah* (or the *sefirah* of *Malkhut*). The precise nature of these configurations are less important here than the fact that Qoraḥ applies them systematically.

Metaphors associated with hair fascinate Qoraḥ. On the verse, "black locks adorn him, guarded and slowly ripened grapes" (*zān zayn al-jaʿīd al-muẓlamī / karm ʿātaq mahlan ʿāṣamī*), Qoraḥ writes: "His curls are long and black like the black grape that ripens on the vine that is precious and is reserved. The simile, according to the plain meaning, is to hanging curls [or] to the laws (*halakhot*), for the Torah is likened to a grape vine [that nourishes] the emanated world."[64] His equation of the vine with the process of emanation holds in another poem as well: "How lovely he is when he lets down his long thick hair, blacker than a protected [bunches of] grapes in a valley" (*mā aḥsanuh ḥīnamā / yanshur li-jaʿdin tamīm / ḥāluh ṭawīl asḥamā / min karam wādī ʿaṣīm*). "[His hair] grows perpetually from *netsaḥ*, *hod*, and *yesod*," writes Qoraḥ, "making it a guarded vine in its place."[65]

In keeping with the association of the male figure with the comparatively stern *Zeʾir Anpin*, Qoraḥ explains one description of his hair as a martial reference: "I gaze upon his thick hair" (*nanẓur radīm al-jaʿdī*). "When the study of Torah fills our ears in our inner vision our King appears as a youth with orderly rows of locks of hair that spill over his shoulders," Qoraḥ writes. His hair "subdues his enemies (the *Siṭra Aḥra*—"the Other Side") like a sword at the hip of a warrior."[66]

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[61] Ibid., 210n7.
[62] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 50–51.
[63] Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:335n282.
[64] HH, 171n21, n23.
[65] Ibid., 252n14.
[66] Ibid., 479. On the *Siṭra Aḥra* see Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 73.

As for the hair of the *Shekhinah*, the female divine potency, Qoraḥ parses the verse "Your tresses are gold chains" (*jaʿīd lak salas dhahabānī*) by saying, "The woman's (*nukva*) hair is red according to the secret of 'the locks of your head are like purple' " (Song of Sol. 7:6). He goes on to quote a passage from *The Book of Raziel* and explains that "the *sefirot Netsaḥ*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* of the *Zeʾir Anpin*, which [together] constitute divine mercy *(raḥamim)*, make themselves manifest in her hair. . . ."[67] A verse in a different poem, "His locks of hair are gold chains, darkened by musk, ambergris, and compound perfume" (*jaʿduh salūs al-dhahīb / wa-aḍfāruhū ka l-ẓalām / miskun wa-ʿanbar wa-ṭīb*), challenges Qoraḥ's referential system because it describes a male figure as having light colored hair. But the word "darkened" (*ka l-ẓalām*) provides a way out—his was the black hair of the *Zeʾir Anpin*.[68]

Moving down the beloved's body (and down the sefirotic *anthropos*): "Also, this comely youth's forehead is like the pale crescent moon. His light dazzled me" (*wa-ayḍan jabīn dhā l-ghulām mithl al-hilāl al-wakīb / kam kazzanī nūruhū*). The light emanating from his forehead upon the moon represents the emanation of the the "face" of *Raḥamim* upon the *sefirah* of Mercy (*ḥesed*).[69] Here Qoraḥ finds Lurianic ideas concerning the emanation of the divine potencies (*sefirot*) within this poetic metaphor. The verse, "His glances are like arrows—he shoots but he does not strike the mark" (*ṭarfuh shabīh al-suhām / yarmī wa-mā hū yaṣīb*), is the basis for a clever homily: "Despite the fact that [God] passes judgement upon that which is below, due to His mercy (*ḥesed*) he does not cause harm to the one who incurred the judgement against himself in order that he might repent."[70]

Qoraḥ bases another fine homily on the conventional simile likening the lover's glances to projectiles. "His eyebrows are bows and his mouth is festooned with diamonds, guarded by his [armed] eyes which shoot young men [glances] like arrows" (*ḥayth ḥawājib / nawāẓirhu qawās /*

[67] HH, 212n5.
[68] Ibid., 255.
[69] Ibid., 255.
[70] Ibid., 255.

wa l-mahaj[71] *muthalath*[72] *afṣāṣ más / ḥāʾiṭuh fī l-naẓar wa l-iḥtirās*[73] */ rāmiyyah li l-fatā mithl al-suhām*). Qoraḥ connects the motif to the story of Joseph:

> According to one lovely interpretation, in "Archers bitterly assailed him [meaning Joseph]; They shot at him and harried him" [Gen. 49:23] the "archers" (*beʿale ḥetsim*) meant the eyes of [Joseph's] mistress. The simile also refers to God's eyes, which dart to and fro.[74]

The biblical Joseph plays a part as well in Qoraḥ's explanations of the word "*yūsufī*," meaning "as beautiful as Joseph," and a common adjective in Arab *ḥumaynī* poetry. He interprets the verse, "the youth, like Joseph in beauty, with generous hands" (*al-fatā al-yūsufi samiḥ al-banān*), by saying that this youth was actually

> the Holy One, blessed be He, to whom the Rabbi [al-Shabazī] affixed the appelation "Joseph" according to what is said in the *midrash* on "If only it could be as with a brother, As if you had nursed at my mother's breast" (Song of Sol. 8:1). It says that "if only it could be as with a brother" and so on must refer to Joseph and his brothers after all of the evil things they had done to him, as it is written: "And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children. Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them" (Gen. 50:21). He comforted them and spoke to their hearts. Shouldn't we argue, *a minori ad maius*, that Joseph, who spoke kindly to his brothers and comforted them [is much less when compared to] the Holy One, Blessed be He, who will comfort Jerusalem. It is for this reason that the poet called [God] "*yūsufī*"; that is, to designate the comfort he will provide in the future.[75]

This passage is a good example of Qoraḥ's kabbalistic homilies, because he accepts the identification with the biblical Joseph inherent in the poetic image but provides it with a creative ethical and theological turn by identifying Joseph with God.

Qoraḥ also takes pains to explain the poem's referents. For example, the light imagery surrounding the teeth generates associations with the

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[71] This word is obscure to me and to R. Qoraḥ, who wrote "I don't know if this refers to a nose ring (*ḥoṭam*), or to the brow, or if it is a symbol of the eyelids since this is a figure of speech." (Ibid., 172n27).

[72] See Ibid., 210n8, where "*thalthatuh*" symbolizes the three *sefirot* that are mentioned in a specific place in the *Zohar*.

[73] Qoraḥ explained that this means the eyeballs and the eyelids, which guard them.

[74] HH, 172n30. See also Ibid., 332n14.

[75] Ibid., 101n7. There is a similar homily on 404.

emanatory system. "When he laughs it is as if lightning flashed from his smile, its light igniting the East and the North" (*muḍḥikuh baraq / yishʿal bāsimī / nūruh yaltahib sharqī wa-shām*).[76] "This refers to the world of Intellect, as opposed to the world of souls (*neshamot*)," writes Qoraḥ.[77] The sexual aspect of the poetry, according to Qoraḥ, reflects a sexual teaching of the *Zohar*—namely, that God makes love to the righteous in the Garden of Eden.[78] On the verse, "his teeth are pearls" (*wa-asnānuh al-durr*), Qoraḥ writes: "this refers allegorically to how the Holy One, Blessed be He, disports with the righteous in the Garden of Eden to reward them for upholding the [commandments] of the Torah."[79]

Qoraḥ goes on to explain further significances. According to him, the verse, "His lips are sweet and they are redder than agates" (*safāt al-ʿadhībī tifūq al-ʿaqīq*), "refers allegorically to the statement in the Torah: 'more desirable than gold, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb […] (Psalms 19:11).'" As for "His saliva is like wine of a fine old vintage" (*wa-rīquh ka l-khamr al-zabīb al-ʿatīq*), Qoraḥ says: "This is to say that his mouth is sweet—these are the *mitsvot* of the Torah, as it says 'sweeter than honey' and the souls of the righteous enjoy it [his saliva] [in Paradise]."[80]

Qoraḥ also explains several difficult verses, such as the following, which treats the beloved's legs and feet: "He planted his feet down—they are the best part of his legs, his toes were liberally perfumed with the flowering top of the *kādī* plant / and the soles of his feet were like gemstones [probably from the red henna]" (*ṭayat ṭawārif li-aqdāmin khuṣūṣ / qabwu kādī bi-abyānih taghūṣ / thumm al-aʿqāb tushbih li l-fuṣūṣ*).[81] Qoraḥ likens them to the structure of the cosmos:

> The spheres, which are like the layers of an onion, rotate around two poles […] "their sparkle was like the luster of burnished bronze" (Ez. 1:7) i.e., these are the stars, which are called "ankles." This is a symbol

[76] Ibid., 171.

[77] Ibid., 172n25.

[78] See Yaakov Elman, Michal Govrin and Mark Jay Mirsky, trans. "Love in the Afterlife," in *Rabbinic Fantasies*, ed. David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 239–252.

[79] HH, 405.

[80] Ibid., 404.

[81] On the *kādī* plant see Muṭahhar ʿAlī al-Iryani, *Fawq al-jabal* (no place of publication: 1991), 44n1. The words "*waṭaʾat*" and "*banānih*" rather than *ṭayat* and *abyānih* would have made better sense.

> of the world of the spheres—It is said that the footprints of the Primal Man diminished the light of the solar sphere.[82]

In his commentaries, R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ systematically develops the theosophical ramifications of sensual Arabic verses in Shabazian poetry. He helps future readers to see that the ambiguities in the depiction of the beloved's gender correspond to the polymorphous configurations of the Godhead in its masculine and feminine aspects. His or her body is the body of Primal Man, the ladder of the *sefirot*, and the cosmos of the Lower World, which mirrors its structure. The description of the beloved's hair and face contains coded references to three distinct constellations of divine potencies: *Arikh Anpin, Ze'ir Anpin*, and *Shekhinah*. The ethical implications of these constellations (i.e., the problem of theodicy) manifest themselves in the depiction of the beloved's arrow-like glances. The eroticism of the description of the beloved translates into God's erotic love for the righteous in Paradise.

As I have mentioned, Shabazī himself emphasized the esoteric dimension of his poems. Qoraḥ's commentaries provide the most detailed picture of the manner in which Yemeni Jews interpreted the mysteries of Shabazian poetry within its most ostensibly accessible building block: sensual Arabic verse. At the same time, one must not forget that Qoraḥ's interest in plumbing the depths of mystical teachings coincides with a scholarly outlook on his subject. The fact that Shabazian poetry partakes in broader currents of Yemeni Arabic poetry led him to attend Muslim celebrations and note the attributes that the two corpora shared. In sum, Qoraḥ's commentaries represent the most vigorous statement of both the esoteric and exoteric meanings of Shabazian poetry.

The Problem of the Exoteric Interpretation of Shabazian Poetry

The fact that Qoraḥ attended Muslim celebrations may not seem, at first blush, terribly daring. After all, such things must have happened in Yemen over the centuries, especially in small villages where Jews and Muslims intermingled relatively freely. The significance of this act becomes apparent only after considering the broader context. Qoraḥ lived in a time of rigid social segregation and of intense and intensifying persecution of the Yemeni Jewish community by Muslims. Jews,

[82] HH, 172n31.

for their part, had thoroughly internalized and granted metaphysical dimensions to this power dynamic. They saw their own persecution as God's punishment and fervently hoped that God would forgive their sins and grant them a messianic redeemer to overturn Muslim hegemony. They may have been *in* Yemen, but they did not believe themselves to be *of* Yemen. For Jews or Muslims, the idea that a Muslim celebration might parallel a Jewish celebration was far-fetched. First, Jews were entirely distinct from Arabs. Second, Jews did not "celebrate." Qoraḥ prefaces his commentary with a "note on the strophic poems (*shirot*)" that reads:

> It is forbidden to us to celebrate with feasting, drink, dancing, and other pleasures, the way that non-Jews celebrate, as the prophet said: "Rejoice not, O Israel, / As other peoples exult; / For you have strayed / Away from your God: / You have loved fornication / By every threshing floor and press / the new grain shall not join them, / And the new wine shall fail them." (Hosea 9:1)…R. David Kimḥi (may his memory be a blessing) interpreted this "Do not rejoice, Israel, when a happy occasion occurs like the setting up of the bridal canopy or something like it, for you cannot rejoice like the other nations, for they have not forsaken their gods while you have committed adultery against God and you have worshipped the gods of other nations. Therefore, you must play the mourner over this and must never celebrate for any reason, just as the generation of the desert did after Moses reproached them for the matter of the [Golden] Calf. 'It is said: when the people heard this harsh word, they went into mourning, and none put on his finery.' (Ex. 33:4)."[83]

Shabazian poetry was the most cherished cultural property of the Yemeni Jews. However, its eroticism, its Arabness, and its joy generated anxiety. Those who wrote the introductions to the traditional *Dīwān*, the anthology of Yemeni Jewish poetry, most frequently expressed these fears. R. Sāliḥ b. Yaḥyā (1665–1749), a Ṣanʿāʾ judge, penned the first of these.[84] R. Ṣāliḥ appended the following note on poetry to a work entitled *Pri tsadik* (*The Fruit of the Righteous*), written from 1717 to 1740:

> May the bridegrooms rejoice and the roses multiply, let sorrows fade away and let the young, old, and simple-minded understand. May the grooms be joyful with strophic poetry (*shirot*) and songs (*renanot*), set to many melodies, with happiness and a fear of sin. [However] Let them leave off of the lustful poems that the Arabs wrote in a foul language for which

[83] Ibid., 99.

[84] Yosef Tobi and Shalom Serri, eds., *Yalkut Teman: Leksikon* (Tel Aviv: "Eʿaleh bi-tamar," 2001), 221.

> there is no excuse for they lead hearts into error and [allow] thoughts to be guided by the passions. They abuse pure minds, causing distress to men and beasts alike, drying up water sources, robbing men's teeth of their daily bread, and making the hands and feet weak with hunger and illness. All of this blocks any mercy, whether heavenly or earthly, from paupers and beggars, widows and orphans, who are innocent. They mix the sacred and the profane, so that the Upper Table is overturned. Our customs clear obstacles from the paths of men and women so that they are not punished. They will call to mind hardships past and hardships to come, and will perservere in doing good, for sons and for fathers, to decrease the level of sin and uphold the commandments, both those mandated by the Torah and those mandated by the intellect, to study the Torah with a pure and clean soul, to gain the rewards of both worlds, and to return the soul to its place of origin above…[85]

This passage sheds light on poetry among Jews in Yemen a half century after the Mawzaʿ exile. The problem for R. Ṣāliḥ is poetry performed at weddings. *Shirot* set to music are praiseworthy. (These are also presumably described in the section beginning "our customs…"). Poems written by Arabs deserve blame for several reasons: first, Jews waste money listening to music that would be better spent in charitable pursuits; and second, such poems arouse the carnal passions and lead to sin.

The chronicle of R. Saʿīd b. Shlomo Ṣaʿdī confirms the idea that some Yemeni Jews wanted to hear Arabic poetry at weddings and at parties in their homes. During Ḥanukah in 1726, guests at a wedding "prevented the poet from reciting poems in the Holy Tongue and ordered him to sing '*ashʿār*'" (that is, Arabic love poems).[86] Ṣaʿdī also expressed his consternation over the behavior of the younger generation. "In those days many sons rebelled against their fathers and went out after they fell asleep to the '*samrah*' [parties with music]." On this general theme, Ṣaʿdī continues:

> In the month of Shevaṭ a wicked and murderous man from a distant land arrived to sing songs of lust. The men of his age group rejoiced at the presence of someone like him as if the harvest had arrived. They prepared elaborate banquets for him outfitted with every musical instrument and they fought over him, this one saying "he will dine at my house" and the other one saying "he will dine at my house." They seized his clothes

[85] Quoted in Yehudah Ratzhaby, "Tsurah ve-laḥan bi-shirat teman le-sugeha," in *Tatslil* 4.8 (1968) 21; Ratzhaby, *Shirat teman ha-ʿivrit*, 45.

[86] Yosef Qāfiḥ, ed., "Sefer 'Dofi ha-zeman' le-Rabi Saʿid Tsaʿdi," in *Sefunot* 1 (1956): 237.

> so that they were nearly torn off. All of this was because of their great passion for "*ashʿār*."[87]

Returning to R. Ṣāliḥ's statement, perhaps the most surprising and interesting point he makes is that the Arabs' poems "mix the sacred and the profane" (*meʿarevim kodesh ve-ḥol*). This shows that, for R. Ṣāliḥ, these Arabic poems possess a sacred quality, however compromised by sensual language. The word "mix" (*meʿarevim*) might also connote "Arabizing," as in, "they render the sacred and the profane in Arabic." The charges of mixing sacred and profane—and of employing sensual Arabic imagery—could, of course, be leveled against the very poems that R. Ṣāliḥ upheld as praiseworthy poetry, that is, Shabazian *shirot*. R. Ṣāliḥ walked a very fine line here. The saving graces of Shabazian poetry may have been its messianic-redemptive view of Jewish history ("they will call to mind hardships past and hardships to come"), the fact that it led men to the Torah (in its Hebrew strophes and in the symbolic interpretation of its Arabic verses), and that it reminded men of their souls' supernal origins through the dream-vision theme.

In an anonymous introduction to the *Dīwān*, whose importance Bacher recognizes, the author approaches the problems of poetry more systematically than did R. Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā. He addresses al-Shabazī's poetry specifically.[88] Al-Shabazī was the greatest poet, his poetry "gathers together the insights of Torah," and "all of the poets who came after him studied his poetry tirelessly but never even reached the level of the dust on his feet." "He joined profound wonders to the secrets of his poetry." This writer contrasts the high standard set by al-Shabazī with some of the poets of his own day "who roar like bears but do not know

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[87] Ibid., 239–240.

[88] Ratzhaby is incorrect when he says that this, the most famous such introduction, was written by R. Yehudah Jizfān. "Tsurah ve-laḥan," 21. Bacher found the text in a *dīwān* purchased in Jerusalem in 1895 (he designates it Adler 1) and found it noteworthy enough to include in his book but he also said that the author was anonymous. *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 12, 51–53. Idelsohn published the introduction by R. Jizfān, followed by the Adler 1 text from Bacher (*Shire Teman*, 356–357). The 1931–2 and 1968 *Dīwān Ḥafets Ḥayim* clearly copied Idelsohn's version of Jizfān's introduction without indicating that Adler 1 was a different text—this is the likely source of Ratzhaby's mistaken attribution. Yosef Tobi said that Adler 1 was written by the nineteenth-century R. Seʿadyah Manṣūrah. "The Sources of Harīzī's '*tenaʾe ha-shir*' (conditions of poetry) in *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* of Arabic poetry," in *Medieval Encounters* 1.2 (1995): 185. He must have gotten Adler 1 confused with a *dīwān* introduction by R. Manṣūrah that mentions al-Ḥarizi's rules, printed in the 1931–2 *Dīwān Ḥafets ḥayim* and in Ratzhaby's "Tsurah ve-laḥan," 21–22.

the beauty of the written word. They are full of melodies but they try to swallow their words so that the audience does not recognize their poor quality." "Sometimes," he writes, "they sing songs that are forbidden to listen to (he who hears them should rend his clothing) though they are as pleasant as a bundle of myrrh."[89]

This anonymous writer proposes to ameliorate the sorry state of poetry by laying down seven rules. These rules were modeled on the "rules for poetry" (*tnaʾe ha-shir*) of the Spanish writer Judah al-Ḥarizi with changes made for the needs of Yemeni Jews.[90] The changes this writer makes to al-Harizi's rules illustrate not only the differences in the social setting of Jewish poetry between Spain and Yemen, but also the contrast between Andalusian and Shabazian poetics.

In the third rule, the Yemeni writer cautions the would-be poet to "be aware lest he, God forbid, compare sanctified things to those of Sodom." This rule reflects the perceived danger of interpreting using erotic metaphors for sacred matters. The fifth rule adjures the poet "to silence the group so that it will not be as a cross-roads like the market place." Ḥarizī, like the Arabic sources from which he drew, did not find the audience's demeanor worthy of comment. This rule for the Yemeni Jewish poet may show the importance of audience participation and appreciation in the Yemeni context.

The Ṣanʿānī scribe and poet R. Yehudah Jizfān (1765–1837), a student of R. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ, played a central role in disseminating R. Sālim al-Shabazī's poetry, at least among the Jewish communities in and around Ṣanʿāʾ. Many extant copies of the *dīwān* were written in his hand.[91] In his introduction to the *dīwān,* he writes about R. Sālim al-Shabazī:

> . . . God roused the spirit of our lord, the light of our dispersion, our rabbi and teacher Shalom Shabazī (may he be remembered in the world to come) and he composed poems that answer our plea, poems that dislodge the obstacles that prevent our prayers from ascending, as was described by the author of the holy *Sefer Ḥemdat Yamim* in Chapter Seven on the subject of Shabbat: . . . The honored poems that our lord, Rabbi Shalom Shabazī (may he be remembered in the world to come) wrote speak of heavenly matters that were passed down from one to another from the

[89] Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie*, 52 (Hebrew section).
[90] Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 359; Tobi, "The Sources of Harīzī's '*tenaʾe ha-shir*'," 185–186.
[91] Tobi, "Perushehem shel R. Yaḥyā Koraḥ ve-shel R. Shalom al-Sheykh," 57.

> holy mouth of Rabbi Shimʿon Bar Yoḥai (peace be upon him) and from the mouths of those sages who followed in his footsteps.

This passage makes clear that al-Shabazī had become the central hero of Yemeni Jewish culture, "the light of our dispersion." His poetry not only drew inspiration from the teachings of the kabbalah; it also represented a central kabbalistic tradition, passed down through the generations from the Talmudic sage, and eponymous author of the *Zohar*, Shimʿon bar Yoḥai.

Jizfān explains the process by which Shabazian poetry operated in the following passage:

> When we recite these poems, whose essential characteristic is that they remove the obstacles that delay our prayers from rising to Almighty God, in the house of the groom and the bride we rouse the love of the "youth" for the "maiden," [that is] the Holy One, blessed be He, and his *Shekhinah*, in the world above, who are the heavenly model for the earthly couple. This is especially true in the case of the poems that Rabbi Shalom Shabazī (may his memory be a blessing) wrote which are all lofty secrets, a ladder thrust earthward whose top is in heaven… [By reciting his poetry] we awaken God's love for us, we unify the divine measures in the higher realm, and these stimulate an emanation upon themselves from the light of the Limitless (*Eyn Sof*) who is God and these, in turn, emanate upon the Upper Worlds on downwards, from one level to the next…

The performance of Shabazian poetry possesses numerous benefits: it makes prayers more efficacious, but more importantly, it stimulates a union in heaven between divine potencies whose emanatory progeny descend upon humanity. Therefore, the wedding celebration generates benefit for the universe.

All of these weighty consequences are, of course, counterbalanced by the danger that a person or people might take Shabazian poetry literally. Jizfān writes:

> If, in [al-Shabazī's] poetry, you see corporeal descriptions like "hand" and "foot" and the other limbs, then be off with you, "and go down before the 'rain' stops you" [I Kings: 18:44—punning on *geshem* "rain" and *geshem* "body"] because he is speaking of higher matters, in heavenly secrets and divine measurements, with which he and those who follow in his footsteps were familiar.[92]

[92] This text appears in Idelsohn, *Shire Teman*, 354–356 and HH, 6–9.

He continues:

> There are men who gather together to drink libations of wine in joy and friendship, as occurs during the entertainment [surrounding the union] of the groom and the bride. When they sing songs of Shabazī's [it is as if] "a cry is heard in Ramah" (Jer. 31:14) from their mouths and from others "one could not tell that they had consumed them" (Gen. 41:21) and their hearts ran out to the spring—they looked at whatever they wanted [pun on Gen. 24:29: "and Laban ran out to the man at the spring"] for they could not distinguish what the poems' meaning was so the poems aroused their lust. They rendered the poems like any other songs with instruments, making them fly about the air, neither adding nor subtracting (i.e., complete frivolity), and thus they increased their transgression.

R. Seʿadyah Manṣūrah (d. 1880), whose collection of mystical *maqāmāt, Sefer ha-maḥashavah*, includes many of the author's own poems composed in the Shabazian style, makes a similar assessment of both the heights of devotion that Shabazian poetry enabled and the depths of sin possible through its misinterpretation. As for "our poems that our forefathers set down," they are

> laments and elegies, remembering our hardships of times past. They contain prayers, supplications, and predictions of happy news to come. They were all uttered with a holy spirit and they speak of matters of *Zohar* and Talmud.[93]

To the rabbi's chagrin, there are "many from among our people" who

> become aroused when they hear the voice of the singer and his tune, they see dancing and they begin to shake, they take great delight in the perversities of his mouth, and are unafraid that his shoots are cut[94] or that his shouting garbles letters; He pays no heed to long and short syllables (i.e., to meter), making of it a thing of marble (*bayit shel shaysh*) for every wild man (*medares*) and impure gonorrhea sufferer.[95] Whenever the intelligent man sees this his ears tingle and he is dismayed. In truth, [as for] him who takes these poems lightly, when they are the words of the living God or the lights of the firmament, and decides in his own

[93] This introduction appears in HH, 9–10; Ratzhaby, "Tsurah ve-laḥan," 21–22, and in its fullest version in Naḥum, *Sefer ha-teʿudah*, 232–233.

[94] I.e., that he is, or is well on his way to becoming, an apostate. This image refers to the story of Elishah b. Avuyah in *BT Hagigah* 14v.

[95] This passage seems to be based on the story in *BT Hagigah* 14v as well. There, something that looked like "marble" triggered the apostasy, madness and death of three of four rabbis. Here, Manṣūrah seems to say, if such a hallowed mystery could cause such dire consequences to great sages, imaging what it might do to low sorts of people, i.e., "every wild man (*medares*) and impure gonorrhea sufferer (*dish*)."

> mind that they are not very important, not knowing that they are hewn from sapphires and more important than any other thing, woe to him who busies himself with this poetry, making a horrific spectacle of it, and woe to his soul, for he is like one who marries a servant woman and divorces a noble lady[96] and it may happen (God forbid) that he defiles these holy things and delays Redemption.

Here, the problem is not only inattentive and unscholarly audiences, but also singers who are themselves suspect in their probity (and their ability to perform well). In addition, Jizfān and Manṣūrah's comments make clear that a specific decorum prevailed during the performance of Shabazian poetry. While it involved music and dancing, these pleasures should not distract from its essentially sacred purpose. Also, participants should not become overly excited. Fortunately, the remedy for such problems is the correct performance of the selfsame poetry:

> He who can undo such damage and can remove the stumbling-block from the path of one who is light and skinny and save a debased and humiliated people, verily he upholds the word of every prophet and visionary. Indeed, when the poems are rendered properly, with a sore and contrite heart, a pleasant scent rises before the King of King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. This arouses the lovers' love and causes the groom to unite with his bride and he purifies the voices in the future. Thus, a man needs to pray before poems are recited in order to ready his heart…[97]

R. Manṣūrah ends his introduction by including a prayer to be recited by one who is about to perform Shabazian poetry.

Dor Deʿah *and Shabazian Poetry*

Two alternative anecdotes explain the emergence of *Dor Deʿah*, the radical critique of Yemeni Jewish religion and culture that emerged in the early twentieth century. The first anecdote locates the emergence of the schism in the charismatic personality of R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ. Qāfiḥ struggled to introduce a modern educational program to Yemeni Jews, where Jewish children would study the natural sciences and mathematics, learn Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish, and engage in physical education. He lambasted the traditional *maktab*, deeming it a gloomy and

[96] For Yemeni Jews, the Arabs and Islam were identified with Hagar. This passage may imply a contrast between Arabs and Jews in the field of poetry.

[97] Ratzhaby, "Tsurah ve-laḥan," 21–22; Naḥum, *Sefer ha-teʿudah*, 233.

filthy room where children learned religious texts by rote. Qāfiḥ was ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavor, largely due to the opposition of significant elements of the Jewish leadership in Yemen, as well as the involvement of a variety of non-Yemeni organizations and individuals.[98] The modern school that opened briefly under his direction only managed to enroll about seventy students.[99]

Qāfiḥ's agenda of reform, however, was not limited to the educational sphere. In Qāfiḥ's view, Yemeni Judaism, which had once shown unprecedented regard for the philosophical work of Maimonides, Seʿadyah Gaon, and other thinkers, had gone terribly astray in the sixteenth century with the diffusion of kabbalistic works. Qāfiḥ argued that the most important of these, the *Zohar*, was not only inauthentic, but also the work of a Christian. He detailed these views in pamphlets and in a book published in 1931, called *The Wars of the Lord* (*Milḥamot ha-shem*). The schism between those who agreed with his position (derisively named *Dardaʿim*) and the majority who opposed it (called *ʿIkkeshim*—"the Distorters" by the *Dardaʿim*), broke out one Rosh Hashanah after services outside the Alsheikh Synagogue in Ṣanʿāʾ when R. Ḥayim al-Naddāf overheard R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ railing against elements of the liturgy that had been inspired by the kabbalah.[100] In its most benign formulation, this schism within the Yemeni Jewish community is depicted as a disagreement between two valid rites: the "*Shāmī*" (the Sephardic rite) and the "*Baladī*" (the Yemeni rite). Nevertheless, even those who argue this point, such as R. Shalom Gamliel (an eyewitness and participant in the events in question), concede that the liturgy was only one dimension of the controversy.

Another perspective on the controversy locates the origins of the schism in the visit of one or more European Jews to Yemen. The most cited candidate for this dubious honor is Joseph Halévy, the French Jewish archaeologist who came to Yemen to investigate Sabaic antiquities in 1869–1870 on behalf of the Académie Française. Halévy was

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[98] See Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 164–202.

[99] Ibid., 184; Ratzhaby, "Le-Toldot ha-maḥloket ʿal ha-kabalah," 100.

[100] S.D. Goitein, "The Jews of Yemen," in *Religion in the Middle East*, ed. A.J. Arberry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1:233–234; Ḥayim Sharʿabi, "Perakim mi-farashat 'dor-deʿah' bi-teman," in *Shvut Teman*, ed. Yisrael Yeshayahu and Aharon Tsadok (Tel Aviv: Hotsʾat "mi-teman le-tsiyon," 1945), 204. Under Ottoman rule over Highland Yemen and in British-controlled Aden there were Jews who became secular to one extent or another. The *ʿIkkeshim* grouped these together with the *dardaʿim* but it seems clear that this is not a fair assessment of the *Dor Deʿah* project.

also an ardent Zionist who composed poems of longing for the Land of Israel.[101] Halévy hired a Ṣanʿānī Jew, Ḥayim Ḥibshush, to be his guide. Ḥibshush, who left a remarkable account of his travels with Halévy in colloquial Arabic, became one of the principal figures in the *Dor Deʿah* movement.[102]

According to one influential account, a few Yemeni rabbis, eager to show their illustrious guest the great extent of their pious devotions, woke the Frenchman after midnight to survey the bustling activities at several synagogues, including the study of kabbalistic texts and the singing of poetry. Halévy's quixotic reaction was to kneel down and exclaim "Blessed be the true God! They have forsaken the words of the living God and busy themselves with books such as these!" This began a lengthy tirade against the kabbalah.[103]

The idea that the *Zohar* was a pseudepigraphic forgery written by Moses de Leon, a thirteenth-century Castilian Jew, and not the work of the Talmudic sage R. Shimʿon bar Yoḥai, arose with the beginnings of modern Jewish scholarship in Heinrich Graetz's *Geschichte der Juden*. For many European adherents of Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), the kabbalah encapsulated the irrational side of Judaism that needed to be excised in order for Jews to become modern men. Assuming that the anecdote is accurate, this fact may explain Halévy's angry outburst, which set in motion an unsettling chain of events. "It is possible to say that the entire schism that occurred in Yemen came as a result of Halévy," writes Yosef Qāfiḥ.[104]

One or more European Jewish figures may have contributed the initial "kernel" that led to the schism. Alternatively, it may have originated and unfolded solely within an Arabic-Islamic milieu. By focusing on the foreignness of the opposition to the kabbalah, Yosef Qāfiḥ,

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[101] Yehudah Nini, "Pulmus mi-ʿinyan vikuaḥ ʿakar ʿal ḥokhmat ha-kabalah beyn ḥakhme teman bi-reshit ha-meʾah," in *Mikhaʾel* 14 (1997): 217.

[102] In the introduction to this account, Ḥibshush explains how Halévy opened his eyes to the sheer folly of his business producing amulets, "which I had learned from the books of the poet, the great rabbi Sālim al-Shabazī and his son, rabbi Shimʿon." Ḥayim Ḥibshush, *Masaʿot Ḥibshush*, ed. S.D. Goitein (1939; repr. Jerusalem: Ben Tsvi Institute, 1983), 6.

[103] Yosef Qāfiḥ, "Korot Yisraʾel be-teman le-R. Ḥayim Ḥibshush," in *Sefunot* 2 (1958): 281n219; Ratzhaby, "Le-toldot ha-maḥloket," 99.

[104] Yosef Qāfiḥ, "Korot Yisraʾel be-teman," 281n219. Nini notes that these rabbis' shock at the visitor's behavior proves that they did not possess a pre-existing animus towards the kabbalah. Nini, "Pulmus," 219n6.

Yehudah Ratzhaby, and Yehudah Nini's accounts obscure the schism's indigenousness.

Some of the "foreign" influences that led to the *Dor Deʿah* may, in fact, have been Turkish. The Ottoman-appointed Chief Rabbi (*ḥakham bāshī*) was often a reform-minded individual in Yemen and elsewhere in the Empire. R. Yitsḥak Shaʾul was brought from Istanbul to serve as *ḥakham bāshī* in Yemen. In 1899, R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ was appointed *ḥakham bāshī*, a role he served for a short period of time. Some complained that students in R. Qāfiḥ's model school, desirous of emulating their Turkish teacher Ziyā Bey, hid their sidelocks under their *tarbush*es.[105] A Zionist emissary, Shmuel Yavnieli, also decried the school as an instrument of Turkification.[106] The Ottoman archives are replete with records of members of Parliament, some of them Jewish, calling for the improvement of the lot of Yemen's Jews.[107] A significant portion of Turkish authorities took an active interest in improving the situation of Yemen's Jews.

The question of foreign influence was never far from the schism over the kabbalah. *ʿIkkeshim* told the Turkish authorities that the *Dardaʿim* worked in league with the French to undermine their rule. *ʿIkkeshim* also told Imām Yaḥyā that the *Dardaʿim* owed their allegiance to Greek philosophy.[108] In a letter to the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris, Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ alleges that Yaḥyā Yitsḥak told the Muslim authorities that Qāfiḥ conspired with the Ottomans, French, and British.[109]

The *Dardaʿim*, in turn, claimed that their opponents cleaved to a Christian and polytheistic faith. They held themselves to be reformers from within Yemeni Judaism and pointed to a number of past attempts to purge the tradition of foreign influences, most notably R. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ's battle against Eleʿazar al-ʿIrāqī over the contents of the prayer book in the eighteenth century.

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[105] Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen*, 185.

[106] Ibid., 185.

[107] Shukri Hanioglu, "Opening remarks," "Judaism and Islam in Yemen" (Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, 27 October 2002).

[108] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Milḥamot ha-shem*, 129; Nini, "Pulmus," 242, Sharʿabi, "Perakim mi-farashat 'dor deʿah'," 206; Yosef Tobi, "Hedim le-vikuaḥ ʿal ha-kabalah bi-sefer "ets ḥayim' le-rabi seʿadyah naddaf (tsanʿa 1926)," in *Meḥkarim ba-lashon ha-ʿivrit uvimadʿe ha-yahadut*, ed. Aharon Ben-David and Yitshak Gluska (Jerusalem: Ha-Agudah le-ṭipuaḥ ḥevrah ve-tarbut, 2001), 109; Tobi, "Mi ḥiber et sefer emunat ha-shem?," in *Daʿat* 49 (2002): 88–89.

[109] Nini, "Pulmus," 252.

The travelogue of R. Yaʿakov Sapir exposed the phenomenon of Jewish messianism in nineteenth-century Yemen to the wider Jewish world. With a nod to Maimonides, whose *Epistle to Yemen*, written in response to a messianic movement in twelfth-century Yemen, was a classic of anti-messianic argumentation, Sapir penned a pamphlet in 1869 entitled *The Epistle to Yemen*. In his pamphlet he decries a messianic movement in Yemen. This was the activity surrounding "Shukr Kuḥayl," a Martin Guerre-like figure who was alleged to have died and to have later reappeared to be embraced by his family and supporters.[110] Opponents of Ḥasidism in Eastern Europe disseminated Sapir's writings on this subject, possibly implying that the dire situation of Yemen's Jews was what could be expected in Europe if Ḥasidism spread.[111] Ḥayim Ḥibshush, the Ṣanʿānī *Dardaʿī* who served as Joseph Halévy's guide to the wilds of the Jawf in search of Sabaic antiquities, lamented the rampant messianism of Yemeni Jewry.

The Turks, who were faced with numerous uprisings against their rule over Yemen, ceded a degree of autonomy to Imām Yaḥyā in Ṣanʿāʾ in the 1911 Treaty of Daʿʿān. Yemeni Muslims had objected to the lengths to which Turkish civil courts had been willing to go to change the strictures under which Jews in Yemen lived. Back in Anatolia, the Ottomans had to decide between their agenda of civilizing Yemen—of which a crucial component was advancing a concept of citizenship that put Muslims and Jews on equal footing—and their desire for a pacified province. The Daʿʿān Treaty represented the triumph of the latter view.

From 1911, legal matters concerning the Jewish community were referred to the Imām and a number of Zaydī judges who specialized in "Jewish affairs." In 1914, the controversy over the kabbalah reached the Imām's court.[112] Each side accused the other of having made recourse to the Muslim authorities.[113] It seems clear, however, that the *ʿIkkeshim*

[110] Bat Zion Eraqi-Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 104–158.

[111] Philip E. Miller, "Shukr Kuḥayl in Galicia: An Anti-Ḥasidic Ruse?," in *Judaeo-Yemenite Studies*, ed. Yosef Tobi and Efraim Isaac (Princeton: Institute of Semitic Studies, 1999), 65–69. Perhaps the rabbi from Yemen in Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Satan in Goray* reflects an association between Yemeni Jews and messianism among Eastern European Jews.

[112] See Mark Wagner, "Jewish Mysticism on Trial in a Muslim Court: A *Fatwa* on The *Zohar*—Yemen 1914," in *Die Welt des Islams—International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 47.2 (2007): 207–231.

[113] In Tobi, "Mi ḥiber et sefer emunat ha-shem?," 88, and Nini, "Pulmus," 233, the anti-*Dor Deʿah* faction (*ʿIkkeshim*) brought the issue to the Imām. In Ratzhaby,

had the upper hand, as leading *Dardaʿim*, including R. Qāfiḥ, were imprisoned for a short time soon after appearing before the court. The *fatwā* delivered on the controversy repeatedly asserts the authority of the leader of the *ʿIkkeshim*, Yaḥyā Yitsḥak.

This legal opinion, called "the *fatwā* of al-Qaflah" because Imām Yaḥyā was still resident in the town of al-Qaflah at that time, provides a fascinating third-person view of this intra-Jewish controversy. The Muslim judge, Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbbās,[114] was relatively unconcerned with the specific arguments about Jewish mysticism. Nevertheless, he conceded to the *Dardaʿim* the argument that the *Zohar* (*Kitāb al-zawhar*) "contradicts what is in the Torah." The *fatwā* consists of a grab bag of Jewish issues, some connected to *Dor Deʿah*, some not. (The judge or the Imām saw fit to bring up the problem of illegally constructed synagogues and immodestly dressed Jewish women mingling with Muslims.) Of the issues connected to *Dor Deʿah*, the court emphasized the principle of scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*)—that is, the fact that the majority of Jewish scholars were *ʿIkkeshim* was the deciding point in their favor. The Imām and the *ʿIkkeshim* also agreed that the prospect of Jews ceasing to practice customs that enabled them to be differentiated from Muslims (i.e., wearing sidelocks) was an unacceptable one. They came together in the desire to preserve the social and religious status quo.

Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ was undeterred. His radical activities quickly spread by word of mouth to the Yemeni community of Jerusalem and from there to the wider Jewish world. Avraham Naddāf, the leader of the Yemeni Jewish community in Jerusalem, was an *ʿIkkeshi* who, along with his father Ḥayim, had clashed with Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ. R. Saʿīd, another son of Ḥayim's who lived in Jerusalem, wrote a letter in which he reconstructs the courtroom drama that unfolded in Ṣanʿāʾ in accounts of Yemeni Jews who had newly arrived in Palestine. In Saʿīd al-Naddāf's letter, Imām Yaḥyā defends the *Zohar*, quoting Hebrew scripture in the process!

> He [the Imām] said "Do you study the *Zohar*?" [Raḍā (Ratson) Ṣārūm, (1879–1970) a *Dardaʿī*] said "no, I cannot study it because it makes a

"Le-toldot ha-maḥloket," 104 and *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah: Ha-Ḥosef et ha-emet ʿal kat ha-kofrim ha-nikraʾim "dardaʿim" umegaleh et partsufo ha-amiti shel ha-ʿomed bi-roshah* (Brooklyn/Israel, 1993), 75, the *Dardaʿim* went to the Imām.

[114] 1883–1962. He was executed after the revolution, so his biographical entry (pages 643–644) was ripped out of Muḥammad Zabārah, *Nuzhat al-naẓar fī rijāl al-qarn al-rābiʿ ʿashar* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-abḥāth al-yamaniyyah, 1979).

> number of anthropomorphic statements concerning the Creator." The Imām replied "What you say may be true but doesn't the entire Torah speak in anthropomorphic language? Does it not say 'Israel is my first-born son' (Ex. 4:22) and 'we shall make man in our image' (Gen. 1:26)? Also, in the Prophets and the Writings there are some such matters, as in what King David says in Psalm 45—what are these about?" Raḍā answered: "what is said in that Psalm is said about the groom and the bride in order to make them happy." The Imām replied: "No—these are all spiritual matters, not corporeal anthropomorphisms, and they are all 'esoteric matters' (Deut. 29:28) that are spoken of here. If you persist in asking such thick-headed questions like an uneducated man (God forbid!) it all becomes vanity and emptiness, your religion becomes nothing but vanity, your blood becomes permissible to us, and every person who is called a Hebrew will, God forbid, disappear. Know that if the words of the *Zohar* are not accepted then the Torah must follow and, God forbid, everything will be negated. From this day forth, understand and return from your [errant] paths. Go in the footsteps of your forefathers and do not change a thing."[115]

This imaginative exchange furnishes an early example of the romanticized image of Imām Yaḥyā that persists among Yemeni Jews. However, the Imām here is made to push the *Dardaʿī*'s argument ad absurdum: if anthropomorphic language is in itself a sign of polytheism, Jews who follow the Torah are not Jews but polytheists and thus outside of the protection afforded to "peoples of the pact" by the Islamic state.[116]

The Imām's choice of Psalm 45, which describes the union of a man and a woman, as his prooftext, brings us to Shabazian poetry. He accuses Raḍā al-Ṣārūm, and by extension *Dor Deʿah*, of appreciating erotic anthropomorphisms with childish literalism—they are no better than the drunken ignoramuses whom past generations of Yemeni rabbis excoriated in the prefaces to the *Dīwān*. R. Saʿīd or one of his informants may have structured the dialogue in this way because he knew of Raḍā al-Ṣārūm's disregard for Shabazian poetry. He writes:

> I will also tell you that among the statements Raḍā made before a Muslim judge was that all of the poems of Our Teacher the Rabbi Shalom al-Shabazī (may his memory be a blessing) and those [poems] like them are follies (*hevelim*). Rabbi Aharon al-Cohen (the honored and respected) goes to celebratory banquets (*bate mishtaʾot*) and plays music in them (*mizamer ba-hem*) for the lover and his beloved, to arouse those there,

[115] Ratzhaby, "Le-Toldot ha-maḥloket," 120.

[116] A similar argument is made in the introduction to the anti-*Dor Deʿah* work *Emunat ha-shem* (Jerusalem: Dfus Ḥayim Tsukerman, 1937); Nini, "Pulmus," 237.

> both lover and beloved. Raḍāʾ scoffed and said that [the poems] were sensual (*gashmiyot*) and there was nothing in them of spiritual content (*ruḥaniyot*) and that they were all folly and stupidity, etc. Thus he denied all of the secrets of the Torah.[117]

This account is suspect for several reasons: the figure of the Bible-quoting Imām Yaḥyā points to the author's exaggerations and literary embellishments. The obituary of Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm, written by Yosef Qāfiḥ, provides more information on Raḍāʾ's relationship to Shabazian poetry. Ṣārūm, Qāfiḥ reports, was a brilliant scholar of medieval philosophy who specialized in Maimonides' *Guide* in the original and Seʿadyah Gaon's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*; a talented singer whose performance of Shlomo Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut* filled the Maswarī synagogue in Ṣanʿāʾ with congregants each Yom Kippur; and an expert shoemaker. Qāfiḥ makes the following recollection:

> [In Yemen, Jews] sang serious songs, songs of praise and exaltation of God, at wedding parties, circumcision celebrations, and the like… The melodies and sophisticated artistic compositions were pre-set and not many knew them. R. Ratson was also as sharp in this field as one of the artists and it became clear to them that he understood the contents of the poems well while not all of the other artists understood, whether due to the Arabic language, whose treasures were not clear to them, or due to the depth of their subjects, especially the poetry of Yosef [b. Yisrael] Shabazī [sic] and a few of the poems of R. Shalem Shabazī whose subjects were thought (*maḥashavah*) and philosophy. And behold, our Rabbi Ratson was a man of contemplation and philosophy. He was also a keen student of the treasures of the Arabic language in which these poems were written, and knew exactly what it was he was saying. Occasionally, when it felt comfortable for him and when the party became smaller, concentrated with men who knew how to listen, he was willing to explain the contents of the poetry and its themes. There were poems that were especially beloved by him like "*ṭāʾir al-jawn*," "*yā muḥyi al-nufūs*" and the like because of the sublimity of meditation (*shegev ha-dvekut*) that they contained. More than once a party for the seven days of feasting [of a wedding] at the groom['s house], that was made to be a party of eating and drinking, changed into a meeting of spiritual-philosophical unity which caused the participants great spiritual delight. He who has never been present at parties like these cannot feel the pleasure of a party combining the pleasures

[117] Ratzhaby, "Le-Toldot ha-maḥloket," 118. Such statements are also attributed to Raḍā al-Ṣārūm in the polemical *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 74.

> of the body and the delights of the soul together, mixing happiness and gravity, interwoven with remarkable coordination.[118]

Raḏāʾ Ṣārūm was both deeply engaged in and ambivalent about Shabazian poetry. He preferred the poetry of Yosef b. Yisrael—a poet who left behind about forty poems—and read only a few (*meʿaṭ*) poems by the far more important and prolific Sālim al-Shabazī. Of al-Shabazī's poems he read only those "whose subjects were serious thought (*maḥashavah*) and philosophy." This ambivalent attitude seems to support statements made by *ʿIkkeshi* writers that Raḏāʾ Ṣārūm was dismissive of Shabazian poetry. In Yosef Qāfiḥ's account of Raḏāʾ Ṣārūm, we see the beginnings of a radical reevaluation of poetry in line with the reformist agenda of *Dor Deʿah*: poetry of Shabazī's that was worthwhile and authentic was philosophical poetry, not kabbalistic poetry.

Dor Deʿah's strident opposition to kabbalah did not go unnoticed. In 1914, the first of several bans of excommunication against R. Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ was printed and posted on the walls of Jerusalem, signed by a long roster of Ashkenazi and Sephardi rabbis. Qāfiḥ fired back, excommunicating the rabbis of Jerusalem and mocking their belief in the kabbalah. "It is not enough for them" Qāfiḥ writes,

> that they believe, with perfect faith, in the existence of many goddesses, both holy and impure, [which goes] against [the teachings of] all of our prophets and sages (may their memories be a blessing). Rather, they worship "potencies" and "faces," which they associate with the body […].[119]

Qāfiḥ expands his critique of the kabbalah in his books "Wars of the Lord" (*Milḥamot ha-shem*) and "Knowledge of God, a True Torah-Based Critique of the False Critique, Responding to the Wise Rabbi Hillel Zeitlin" (*Daʿat elokim, bikoret emet toriyit neged ha-bikoret ha-shikrit, tshuvah le-ha-haḥam ha-rav hilel tsaytlin*), both published in 1931.[120] Qāfiḥ's critique had theoretical and rhetorical dimensions. For him,

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[118] Yosef Qāfiḥ, *Ketavim* (Jerusalem: ʿAmutat Yad Mahari Kafaḥ, 1989–2001), 2:1041.

[119] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *ʿAmal u-reʿut ruaḥ: Ḥeremot utshuvotam* (Tel Aviv, Defus Koʾoperativi, 1914), 15. Qāfiḥ expanded this theme in *Milḥamot ha-shem*, 95.

[120] The latter work, which Qāfiḥ composed after *Milḥamot ha-shem*, was a response to R. Hillel Zeitlin's (see EJ) article "Kadmut ha-mistorin bi-yisraʾel" in the periodical *Ha-Tekufah* in 1920. In this article, Zeitlin worked to prove the authenticity of the kabbalistic tradition and the reliability of the attribution of the *Zohar* to R. Shimon bar Yoḥai using both traditional and scholarly arguments. Tobi, "Mi ḥiber et sefer emunat ha-shem," 89.

the teeming variety of kabbalistic anthropomorphism was suspect.[121] He took issue with the proliferation of hypostases in Zoharic thought. (He called this "*new* kabbalah" as opposed to "kabbalah," which simply meant Rabbinic tradition and philosophy). This symbolic structure was, for him, arbitrary, and it obscured such fundamental aspects of Judaism as monotheism and the observance of the commandments. In a passage from *Daʿat elokim* that drips with sarcasm, Qāfiḥ writes,

> I was not sure to which body from among the "faces" (*partsufim*) [God's] commandments adhere—is it Primal Man? Perhaps [they are in] the body of the Ancient of Days, in Long Face, or in the body of Father or Mother, or Short Face and his female companion, since he is the one who rules over all created things, and so on?[122]

For Qāfiḥ, kabbalah was an enduring error that had entered Judaism in medieval Spain, and he cried out for its excision. In his view of Judaism, which Tobi accurately describes as "idealistic and utopian," the classics of medieval Jewish philosophy represented the true spirit of the faith. As a direct result of this conviction, he and his students in turn-of-the-century Ṣanʿāʾ devoted a great deal of attention to studying these works, especially Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, in the original Arabic.[123] Although the subject requires further investigation, it seems clear that for Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ and other *Dardaʿim*, the Judaism of medieval Judeo-Arabic philosophy was both true to revelation and accommodating towards the best of contemporary thought.

From the standpoint of such philosophical-theological sources, the kabbalists' conception of anthropomorphic divine attributes presented tremendous problems. For Qāfiḥ, the sexual aspect of this symbolic vocabulary was the thing that excluded it from the realm of the acceptable. "The false prophet, the inciter, the writer of the *Zohar*" had filled his work with obscene language.[124]

> God forbid that they [the "new kabbalists"] should think of R. Shimʿon bar Yoḥai or of even one of our rabbis (may their memory be a blessing) while they are attaching many "faces" (*partsufim*) like these to our God or calling Him by the foul name "Short Face" (*Zeʾir Anpin*), [or while

[121] See especially *Milḥamot ha-shem* sections 75–76 and 92–93.
[122] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Daʿat elokim*, 21.
[123] Yosef Qāfiḥ, *Ketavim*, 2:1036; Yosef Tobi, "Trumat ha-rav yosef kāfiḥ le-ḥeker yahadut teman," in *Sefer zikaron le-rav yosef ben david kāfiḥ*, ed. Zohar ʿÁmar and Ḥananel Serri (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001), 125.
[124] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Milḥamot ha-shem*, sections 92–93.

> they] attribute sexual organs to Him, which are the most indecent and inferior [of all organs connected to] the sense of touch (*ḥush ha-mesos*): a penis and a man's testicles, in which semen is generated.[125]

The connection between the sense of touch and the issue of obscene language stems back to Maimonides' argument in the *Guide of the Perplexed* III:8. The bulk of Qāfiḥ's argument against the acceptability of erotic language in *Milḥamot ha-shem* is a paraphrase of Maimonides' discussion. Nevertheless, Qāfiḥ's discussion takes a slightly different trajectory. In the two passages that follow, Maimonides' text is in Judeo-Arabic and Qāfiḥ's is in Hebrew:

Maimonides

> …The prophet said "The Lord GOD gave me a skilled tongue" (Is. 50:4) and it is not appropriate that this gift that was given to us in order to perfect our learning and knowledge be disposed to the basest of baseness (*anqaṣ al-naqāʾiṣ*) and to utter disgrace (*al-ʿār al-tāmm*), lest it be considered that which the ignorant and corrupt non-Jews utter in their poems and in the narratives connected to them—not of those of whom it is said "but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). He who disposes his thoughts or his speech towards one of these narratives of this sense, which is a disgrace for us, to the point where he thinks about drink and sexual intercourse more than he needs, or recites poetry on this, has taken the gift that he was granted and has squandered it, and used it to rebel against the gift-giver and to contravene his commands and he is as those of whom it is said "I who lavished silver on her, And gold—which they used for Baʿal" (Hos. 2:10).[126]

Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ

> …The prophet said "The Lord GOD gave me a skilled tongue" (Is. 50:4) and it is not appropriate that we should use a gift that exalted God gave in order to perfect learning and teaching for an inferior, indecent thing, [giving voice to] an absolute disgrace that is within us and making us resemble **the non-Jews who act foolishly and fornicate through their songs of lust and [other] lowliness in which they exult in their stupidity and lowliness (as the Rabbis say: "The non-Jews' glory is in transgression." "A non-Jew makes himself heard")**[127] and not like those who are

[125] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Daʿat elokim*, 21.

[126] Moshe b. Maimon (Maimonides), *Moreh ha-nevukhim (Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn): Makor ve-targum*, trans. Yosef Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-rav kook, 1972), 3:473–474.

[127] In its original context, *Ḥullin 133v*, the second statement means that the Gentile inevitably protests against his Jewish business partner's actions. Here, Qāfiḥ evokes the passage as an audial image, i.e., "The Gentile bleats excessively." His poetry sounds like a sheep's bleating.

> the portion of Jacob of whom it is said "but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Any person who uses his mind or his speech to speak of matters of sexual intercourse, which is a disgrace to us, more than is necessary…and as it is written, if he were to recite poems (or "songs"), we use a gift that exalted God gave us for words of rebellion and absolute foolishness and transgress against the Creator's commandments. He is as those of whom it is said, "'I who lavished silver on her, And gold—which they used for Baʿal" (Hos. 2:10).[128]

Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ does not seem to have explicitly addressed the question of Shabazian poetry in his writings. In the section above that is bolded, he modifies Maimonides' argument. He takes out a reference in the *Guide*'s discussion to the Gentiles' objectionable stories and thereby limits the discussion to poetry. He adds Talmudic quotations (indicated by ellipses in the text above), and he makes the passage more polemical. For example, he writes, they "fornicate through their songs of lust" and "exult in their stupidity and lowliness." Qāfiḥ seems to mark poetry for special condemnation. Reservations about poetry expressed in introductions to the *Dīwān* filter into this passage.

The hated "orphan's decree," promulgated in Yemen in the nineteenth century, ruled that Jewish orphans be raised by Muslims. It was only when *ʿIkkeshim* threatened to inform the authorities that Qāfiḥ was harboring his orphaned grandson, Yosef, that the reformer abandoned his public life.[129] In Israel, Yosef Qāfiḥ, the grandson, became widely acknowledged as the spiritual leader of the Yemeni Jews, the vast majority of whom had emigrated to Israel by the 1950s. Over the course of his career, Qāfiḥ affirmed his grandfather's vision of Judeo-Arabic philosophical works holding pride of place in the canon of Yemeni Judaism. He published critical editions and reissues of Judeo-Arabic philosophical works by Seʿadyah Gaon, Maimonides, Netana'el al-Fayyūmī, Baḥya b. Pakudah, and others. Yosef Qāfiḥ was one of the very few people in the world of orthodox Jewry for whom the study of Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Judeo-Arabic original, for example, was both a central and wholly unaffected component of his belief system.

The *Dor Deʿah* controversy in Yemen continued in Israel and centered on Yosef Qāfiḥ. His grandfather Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ's attacks against kabbalah had drawn the attention of R. Avraham Yitsḥak Kook, the chief rabbi

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[128] Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ, *Milḥamot ha-shem*, 110.
[129] Tobi, "Trumat ha-rav yosef kāfiḥ," 124–125.

of Jaffa and the Jewish settlements and a central figure in what would become Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy. Although Kook disagreed with Qāfiḥ's criticisms of the kabbalah, the two corresponded in a collegial manner and undoubtedly shared a strong mutual respect.[130]

The esteem in which Avraham Yitsḥak Kook held Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ carried on to his grandson Yosef, who studied at Kook's religious academy, the Merkaz ha-rav in Jerusalem, a center for Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy. Qāfiḥ became lifelong friends with Kook's son, Tsvi Yehudah Kook, the chief ideological voice for the movement to settle territories conquered in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War with Jews. Thus the *Dor Deʿah* movement had powerful allies in Israeli politics.

The energetic Yosef Qāfiḥ edited manuscripts, issued legal rulings, and became the spokesman for Yemeni Jewry. His book, *Halikhot Teman*, was recognized as a milestone in the preservation of Jewish life in Yemen, which at the time had nearly vanished. He was awarded the Bialik Prize for it in 1963. Qāfiḥ also served on the board of the Association for the Advancement of Society and Culture, an organization that advances the cause of Yemeni Jewish culture through a variety of activities and institutions.

Yemeni Jews in Israel—particularly those whose sympathies lay with the reformist program of *Dor Deʿah*, like Yosef Qāfiḥ—faced a dilemma when they confronted the corpus of Shabazian poetry. On one hand, it was a body of literature impregnated with kabbalistic symbolism and messianism—traits they believed had been destructive to Yemeni Jewish society and intellectual life. On the other hand, Shabazian poetry represented a cherished and highly developed artistic and cultural achievement. In the mid-1970s, Yosef Qāfiḥ delivered a presentation at a conference on Yemeni Jewry entitled, "Eating Fruit in Yemen (On Customs of the Past in Yemen and in the Present in the Land of Israel)." Its somewhat misleading title refers to the snacks served at a traditional gathering in Yemen. In this fiery speech, Qāfiḥ detailed the correct atmosphere and decorum that should be maintained at such a gathering, as well as the meaning and proper performance of

[130] The relationship between Kook and Yemeni Jewry has recently become a topic of controversy. See the recent reevaluation of this relationship by Bat Zion Eraqi-Klorman, "Ha-Rav Kook ushḥitat ha-temanim," in *Afikim* 117/118 (2000): 40–41, 63, and the responses by Neriah Gutel, "Lisheʾlat yaḥaso shel ha-rav kook lishḥitat ha-temanim u-le shoʾvim temaniyim," in *Sefer Zikaron le-rav Yosef ben David Kafih ztsʾl*, ed. Zohar ʿAmar and Ḥananel Serri (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001), 263–287 and Tobi, "Mi ḥiber et sefer emunat ha-shem," 91n13.

Shabazian poetry. Then he proceeded to criticize those among Yemeni Jews in Israel who failed to live up to this standard. "The traditional gathering," writes Qāfiḥ,

> is a time of spiritual elevation through the contemplation of philosophical concepts and the like. When we choose from among the poems of Yemen at the various parties and celebrations we find them all to be poems of reflection, praise, and prayer.[131]

Qāfiḥ provided several examples of such poems. He interprets a poem by al-Shabazī on the ascent of the soul during sleep as a statement of a person's obligations as a Jew, the poet's desire that he and his community become more pure in their actions, as well as an expression of hope for redemption and for the ingathering of the exiles in the Land of Israel. Qāfiḥ concludes that "all of Yemeni [Jewish] poetry is like this."[132]

Here, Yosef Qāfiḥ identifies the contents of al-Shabazī's poem as Religious Zionist in nature: its fundamental points are observance, piety and Zionism. This is not to say that he misinterprets the poem or attributes themes to it that are not there. Yet Qāfiḥ's emphasis that these are the important themes of the poem (rather than the concern with the landscape of heaven, the *sefirot*, etc.) and of Shabazian poetry as a whole, betrays an overarching ideological vision. Qāfiḥ continues:

> I ask, don't these poems, uttered with a stinging precision that descends to the chambers of the belly, with a melody that rejuvenates the soul and stimulates all of its filaments, actually purify the soul, refining and straightening the faculties within a human being? Is it not these and only these poems that our Rabbis (may their memories be a blessing) permitted as a class, notwithstanding the destruction of the Temple (as will become clear from the words of Maimonides)? Who does not remember the aged poets when they sang emotive verses like "would that one could see Jerusalem rebuilt" (*layt man yabṣur al-quds maʿmūr*) in the poem that begins "garb yourself in light" (*ilbas al-nūr*)? I am reminded of R. Shalom Yitsḥak, who was called "al-Qaṣīb," when he used to sing this verse with a voice and a melody saturated with longing and a beard full of tears, or R. Avraham Badīḥī, in the poem "I ask you, O doe-eyed one of the Garden" (*asālak yā ḥūrī al-jinānī*) with his delicate voice, full of grace and his notes, within his pleas that poured forth, that set the soul dancing and trembling, tears all the while flowing while he sang, or R. Yaḥyā Abyaḍ and his partner, R. Sulaymān ʿAmar, through whose changes in melody by raising or lower-

[131] Yosef Qāfiḥ, "Akhilat 'juʿleh' mah hi," in *Moreshet yehude teman*, ed. Tobi and Yeshayahu, 58.
[132] Ibid., 59.

> ing of the voice, emphases and omissions, the listener would understand all of a poem's contents. These things enthrall all who listen to the poetry, its themes and contents. Who wants to eat and who desires drink at times like these? Even those who do not understand much are checked by the astonishment and concentration of those who understand and together all are united in one contemplative body.[133]

Here, Qāfiḥ points to the sincere emotion and musicality of the older generation of Yemeni Jewish scholars as signs of Shabazian poetry's lofty content. When this discussion is compared to Qāfiḥ's reminiscences about Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm, a number of striking parallels emerge. The *Dardaʿī* Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm's ambivalent attitude towards the Shabazian corpus seems to have become, as the preceding passage shows, Yosef Qāfiḥ's understanding of the corpus. A poem mentioned as a favorite of Raḍāʾ's is furnished as an example of a philosophical (and religious Zionist) poem. Qāfiḥ seems to say that while Shabazian poetry did not generate the philosophical discussion that a text like *The Guide of the Perplexed* could, the mastery over musical nuance and the meditative philosophical atmosphere required at its correct performance were valuable in and of themselves. Qāfiḥ goes on to contrast this with the state of poetry in his own time:

> And what are they singing today? I am speaking neither of those who invite singers, speakers of obscenity, vomiters of filth and putrescence, who pollute the world with a pollution far worse than the air is over other countries, nor of those led by folly who melt when they hear the clowning of Avremele Melamed,[134] when the whole community or most of it stands beside the chief clown, distinguishing between pollution and purity as if they were repeating the refrain "I sing to God for he is exalted." These, who think that they are singing biblical verses "the voice of my beloved," even when this is expressly forbidden, as our rabbis (may their memory be a blessing) said: "He who recites a verse from the Song of Songs and makes of it a song and he who recites a verse at a celebration, not in its due time, brings evil into the world […]." (Sanhedrin 101r). [They think it] a good thing that among them there are those who form groups, as is their rule, one's head next to the nape of another's neck, stamping their feet with mooing sounds emanating from their throats: "dance like this," "dance like this," ten and twenty and thirty times. Is this the poetry that our rabbis (may their memory be a blessing) permitted? You know nothing about how to dance! They pick up one leg and set down the other—they make their legs dance, "he makes them skip like a calf"

[133] Ibid., 59.
[134] Yosef Tobi informs me that this is a character from a popular song.

> (Psalms 29:6) Is this poetry permissible? Is a fit person even allowed to stand in a place of such poetry? […] What sort of praise or exultation is there in 'dance like this' other than awakening the soul to unfettered and sick profanity and physical arousal within the swooning of the senses and their anaesthesia, actions that accompany the savage bellowing of "ho ho." They claim that this is "raising up the soul." I understand that this is the raising of the soul from the bottom of the belly to the end of the nose, and everyone with his soul in his nose sits, breathing in and out heavily as tremors grip his extremities and the stink of his armpits wafts [to all] within bowshot. "Raising up the soul" indeed. If this man wanted to solve a complex mathematical problem or understand a difficult geometrical figure would he sit quietly and restfully, concentrating his thoughts and working intently, or would he rise, dance, and stamp his feet? Yes, the latter is what one who has such a soul would do.[135]

This section of the speech is at once highly polemical and deliberately vague, as if to say to those whom it condemns, "you know who you are." Qāfiḥ begins by dismissing what may either be secular singers or professional wedding singers.[136] He seems to have attended a gathering devoted to Shabazian poetry that he felt made a mockery of its subject. The dancers became excited to a degree that went well beyond what would be expected for weighty philosophical material. Their ardor, in fact, was so wildly hyperbolic that its like was to be considered legally prohibited. Much of this problem can be attributed to the dancers' ignorance of Yemeni traditions, as Qāfiḥ writes:

> What is the situation at our parties today? Emptiness and lawlessness. Even so, it is important to remember that most—almost all—of the members of our ethnic group (*bne ʿedatenu*) are not people who understand music (except for a tiny minority who know how to listen).[137]

The identity of the group that Yosef Qāfiḥ singled out for ridicule in his speech became clear in a polemical pamphlet written in the 1990s, probably published by a certain Avraham Sharʿabī,[138] against *Dor Deʿah*, entitled "The Pamplet of the Defending Shield That Exposes the Truth About the Sect of Heretics Called '*Dardaʿim*' [and] That Shows the True

[135] Yosef Qāfiḥ, "Akhilat 'juʿleh' mah hi," 59–60.

[136] In the same vein, R. Yaḥyā b. Netana'el al-Shaykh (1915–1996), a kabbalist of Jerusalem, wrote the following in his introduction to the *Dīwān*: "…It is forbidden to use verses from the Song of Songs like secular poems (like singers do today, to our chagrin, in many places and on the radio) thus transforming the Song of Songs into secular things.…" HH, 5.

[137] Yosef Qāfiḥ, "Akhilat 'juʿleh' mah hi," 61.

[138] Tobi, "Mi ḥiber et sefer emunat ha-shem," 95n32.

Face of the One Who Stands at Its Head [i.e., Yosef Qāfiḥ]" (*Kuntres magen ve-tsinah ha-ḥosef et ha-emet ʿal kat ha-kofrim ha-nikraʾim ʿdardaʿimʾ u-megaleh et partsufo ha-amiti shel ha-ʿomed ba-roshah*). The bulk of this pamphlet consists of a highly polemical commentary on some of the writings of Yosef Qāfiḥ. He is often called "fool, grandson of a fool" (*reka bar bar reka*), and the commentary includes the speech on eating fruit.

The writer of the pamphlet also identifies the people whose performance Qāfiḥ criticized as "the yeshivah students."[139] While the identification is still not as specific as one would hope, it seems that Qāfiḥ attended a meeting where young students of a religious academy danced to Yemeni Jewish poetry. Their performance may have been influenced by the ecstatic dancing of Ḥasidim and, in any case, probably did not display the intricacies of Yemeni Jewish music and dance that R. Qāfiḥ expected.

In lamenting revelers' improper excitement, drinking, and secular erotic poetry, Yosef Qāfiḥ's speech on eating fruit can be seen as the most recent episode in a tradition of cautionary remarks on Shabazian poetry that extends back to R. Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā in eighteenth-century Yemen. Yosef Qāfiḥ located his criteria for distinguishing licit poetry performance from illicit poetry performance in the Talmud, the works of Maimonides, and Plato's *Protagoras*. By doing so, he criticized Shabazian poetry in a way that avoided the pitfalls of both R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's baroque interpretations of kabbalistic themes, and the total dismissal of the canon imputed to the *Dardaʿī* Raḍā Ṣārūm by his opponents.

Qāfiḥ essentially redefined Shabazian poetry, and in this he seems to have taken Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm's lead. Shabazian poetry was no longer kabbalistic—it was philosophical. He brought Shabazian poetry in line with an understanding of the Yemeni Jewish heritage that was modern, Orthodox and Religious Zionist, an understanding that he was in large measure responsible for inculcating among emigrants to Israel and their children. Like *Dor Deʿah*, Religious Zionists had come to embrace the medieval Jewish philosophers as having harmonized religion and modernity. Applying this perspective to Shabazī's poetry required emphasizing certain poems that treated philosophical themes. Since nothing approaching the scale of Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's kabbalistic commentaries

[139] *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 79.

on Shabazian poetry has yet been attempted,[140] these poems seem to be limited to the handful mentioned in Yosef Qāfiḥ's reminiscences of Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm, in his descriptions of Shabazian poets,[141] and in his speech on eating fruit. The claim that Shabazian poetry was composed in the Arabic of medieval Judeo-Arabic philosophy, rather than a local Yemeni dialect, affirms this interpretive agenda.[142] In sum, the Sālim al-Shabazī whom Gershom Scholem called one of the greatest poets of kabbalah, became, through *Dor Deʿah*, a philosophical poet.

Through Yosef Qāfiḥ's dramatic successes as a rabbi and scholar in Israel, his grandfather's movement, *Dor Deʿah*, succeeded, albeit in a form specific to the younger Qāfiḥ's time. Nevertheless, Yemeni Jewish culture, including its cherished poetry, continues to be a contested field among Israeli Jews of Yemeni origin. The anonymous author of the anti-*Dor Deʿah* pamphlet, *Kuntres magen ve-tsinah,* remarks that Yosef Qāfiḥ misrepresented Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm's view of Shabazian poetry, attributing to him a respect for the canon that he did not actually hold.[143] Demonstrations against Yosef Qāfiḥ were held in Jerusalem in 1950 by pro-kabbalah Yemeni Jews when the Rishon le-tsiyon, R. Ben-Zion Ḥay ʿUziel, authorized Qāfiḥ as a *dayan*.[144] *Kuntres magen ve-tsinah* alleges that Qāfiḥ supporters armed with knives threatened those who demonstrated against his being granted the Bialik Prize in 1963.[145]

Opposition to *Dor Deʿah* and Yosef Qāfiḥ was not limited to the question of the controversy over the authenticity of the kabbalah. Some Yemeni Jews in Israel saw the *Dardaʾi*s' desire to accommodate contemporary thought as a process of collaboration with secular Jews who would destroy Judaism. The question of foreign influence, which loomed large when the *Dor Deʿah* emerged in turn-of-the-century Yemen, recurred with new vigor in the multi-ethnic and largely secular Israeli society.

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[140] Ratson Halevi's glosses to Shabazian poetry in his *Shirat Yisraʾel bi-teman*, however, merit further study.

[141] Qāfiḥ wrote two very short essays on Yosef [b. Yisra'el] and Shalom Shabazī (in *Ketavim*, 2:989–993) in which he subtly pushed the philosophical subjects treated by their poetry to the foreground.

[142] Ibid., 2:989.

[143] *Kuntres magen ve-tsinah*, 74.

[144] Tobi, "Trumat ha-rav yosef kāfiḥ," 127.

[145] *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 76.

One area where this concern emerges is in the field of Jewish scholarship. The work of Yosef Qāfiḥ and Yemeni Israeli scholars and community leaders, particularly those affiliated with the Society for the Advancement of Society and Culture, harmoniously incorporated indigenous Yemeni traditions of scholarship and the conventions of European scholarship. Some lamented the fact that influential leaders like Yosef Qāfiḥ made common cause with secular researchers.

Kuntres magen ve-tsinah castigates Yosef Qāfiḥ for having relied in his work on "all manner of heretics, apostates, and scholars" like Shlomo Dov Goitein.[146] The emergence of *Dor Deʿah* in Yemen, according to this writer, was the work of "a heretic and missionary (*misiyonar*) named Glaser" who brought Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ books that denied the kabbalah.[147] In his introduction to the *Dīwān*, R. Yaḥyā b. Netanaʾel al-Shaykh (1915–1996) specifically designated critical scholarship to be one of the most dire pitfalls of interpreting Shabazian poetry. He explained that the prohibition in BT Sanhedrin 101 against using the Song of Songs in a secular context,

> also applied to the poetry of R. Shalom Shabazī and his comrades because they should not be taken literally (God forbid), rather they are allegories like the Song of Songs. God forbid one should listen to the words of A.Z. Idelsohn, who printed R. Shalom Shabazī's poetry, for his readings are mocking and he jokes "like a madman scattering deadly firebrands" (Prov. 26:18). Sometimes he even makes sport with that which has been revealed, as is known from his introduction to the book of poetry and in his small book "The Jews of Yemen and their Songs."[148]

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[146] *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 66. Notwithstanding this attack, the anonymous author quotes with approval Yom-Tov Tsemaḥ, an emissary to Ṣanʿāʾ of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, who unflatteringly described the study circle around Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ as a chaotic scene of talking, singing, *qāt* chewing and coffee drinking, "like a Baghdad coffee shop." *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 66.

[147] *Kuntres Magen ve-tsinah*, 46. Glaser (1855–1908) was a Bohemian scholar who spent several years in Yemen in the 1880s. He shared an interest in astronomy with Yaḥyā Qafih and the two were apparently friends. Goitein confirms that Glaser sent R. Qāfiḥ the Hebrew books *Kinʾat emet*, *Are nohem*, *Sheʾagat ariyeh* and *Kol sekhel*. S.D. Goitein, "Mi hayah eduard glazer," 149. In a letter to the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris, Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ mentioned these and other anti-kabbalistic works. Nini, "Pulmus," 243. Yosef Qāfiḥ, Yaḥyā's grandson, said that Glaser sent his grandfather scientific instruments and Hebrew books on natural science printed in Vilna. Nini, "Pulmus," 227. Glaser was already the target of the anti-*Dor Deʿah* faction in the anonymously authored *Sefer Emunat ha-shem*, a commentary on Yaḥyā Qāfiḥ's *Milḥamot ha-shem*. There the author states that Glaser was a non-Jew, a fact allegedly confirmed by a Jew who followed him into a bath house.

[148] HH, 5 (intro.).

For all of of their rhetorical bluster, the opponents to *Dor Deʿah* and its Israeli heirs seem to have put their finger on several basic contradictions in the *Dardaʿī* view of Shabazian poetry. It is a tendentious case that Shabazian poetry, especially that written by the eponymous Sālim al-Shabazī, served as a vehicle for philosophical discussion rather than mystical theosophy. Also, the same literalism that led uneducated (and, occasionally, tipsy) Jews in centuries past to think that they were listening to Arabic love poetry rather than profound mysteries of faith served as the starting point for modern research. It led R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ to venture into Muslim celebrations, and may have led Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm to dismiss nearly all of this poetry as frivolous and sensual.

*Dardaʿī*s, like Yosef Qāfiḥ, seemed to suggest that Shabazian poetry was not a worthwhile pursuit in either its esoteric or exoteric character. Aside from the problematic argument that it dealt with philosophical questions, the sole remaining justification for its elevated status in Yemeni Jewish culture was that the charged atmosphere and elaborate decorum that prevailed when it was performed well was itself worthy of preservation.[149] By the time of Yosef Qāfiḥ's formulation, this concept had been filtered through the dramatic changes that the Yemeni Jewish community had undergone in the twentieth century. The preservation of a vanished past in Yemen became justification in and of itself for a community that was in the process of assessing its past within the new multi-ethnic, religiously diverse reality in Israel. Nostalgia for the past played no small part in this process. It should, however, be remembered that the philosophical spirit of poetic gatherings in Yemen that R. Qāfiḥ remembered so fondly was itself a twentieth-century phenomenon—and a product of *Dor Deʿah*.

Finally, R. Yosef Qāfiḥ's influential retrospective on Yemeni Jewish culture in Yemen minimized the cultural connections between Jews and the Muslim majority. While anxieties over Arabic influences may have increased after the community had emigrated to Palestine, they had already served as the subject for much hand-wringing by rabbis in Yemen in the centuries prior to their departure. Commenting on Yemeni Jewish musical traditions, Yosef Qāfiḥ explains:

[149] The idea that the combined efforts of participants in a gathering gave the poetry its sacred quality can already be found in the earliest discussions of Shabazian poetry in the introductions to the *Dīwān*.

> It is impossible to claim that the Jews of Yemen were influenced by the people who were in their vicinity—it is simply impossible and unrealistic. It is impossible because the Arabs of Yemen kept Jews at a great distance—it was forbidden for a Jew even to approach the gate of one of their houses of prayer, to be found at one of their banquets, or to relax at one of their parties. From the Jews' perspective, they kept a great distance from them on account of the dictates of Jewish law, and out of national pride. Thus there was no spiritual connection between the two peoples, nor was there any possibility that it might influence their musical compositions or melodies.[150]

This opinion contrasts with R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ's research forays into Muslim celebrations. Similarly, the contemporary writer Shalom Medinah recalls attending a performance of the celebrated Ṣanʿānī Muslim singer, Thābit al-Ḥaynamī in Laḥj, in the 1930s. "The power of his voice," Medinah writes, "merited comparison with the tenor voice of the wonderful singer Yeḥiʾel ʿAdāqī."[151] ʿAdāqī, who we will encounter in chapter eight, was the cantor of the Ezrat ʿAḥim synagogue in Tel Aviv and represented the conservation of authentic Yemeni Jewish musical tradition in Israel. Medinah also writes: "It is appropriate to note here that in a number of [the Muslim singer's] songs the trill and melody resembled some of the songs that I had heard from the Jewish singers of Ṣanʿāʾ."[152]

Conclusion

As symbolic writing, Shabazian poetry exploited the tension between corporeal signifier and mystical signified. Although it was not intended to be understood literally, nineteenth-century commentators were aware that the motifs of Arabic love poetry were much of this poetry's appeal. The consumption of wine and the effervescent emotional atmosphere of poetry performances amplified this tension. Thus, the appreciation of Shabazian poetry, like other types of mystical experience, was in a sense a meritorious transgression: a pious act that flirted with impiety,

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[150] Yosef Qāfiḥ, *Ketavim*, 2:959. On the topic of Arab influence on Yemeni Jewish melodies, see Idelsohn's remarks in *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies*, 1:39.

[151] Shalom Medinah, *Masaʿot R. Moshe Medinah u-vanav* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Agudah le-ṭipuaḥ ḥevrah ve-tarbut, 1994), 210.

[152] Ibid., 210.

like the *samāʿ* concerts or the "gazing upon beardless youths" (*naẓar bi l-murd*) of Sufis.

However, as symbolic poetry, Shabazian poetry also called for explanation. With its sometimes far-fetched misreadings and homiletic reinterpretations of the themes of Arabic poetry, Qoraḥ's work demonstrates not only the heights of Shabazian esotericism, but also the most important Shabazian exegesis. His work stands as the earliest effort to understand this corpus from an historical-philological standpoint.

In the introductions to the *Dīwān*, a series of Yemeni rabbis expressed their anxieties over the erotic Arabic verse contained within the anthology. Over and over, they pointed to the poetry's esotericism and, above all, the carefully choreographed events of a poetry performance, as the factors that could best counter the problem of anthropomorphic literalism.

In the debates that erupted among Yemeni Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, questions revolving around kabbalistic literature and figurative language loomed large. The consequences of *Dor Deʿah* reformers' rejection of kabbalah and of anthropomorphic language did not fully develop until the career of R. Yosef Qāfiḥ, the grandson of the founder of *Dor Deʿah*. Qāfiḥ, relying on the example of Raḍā Ṣārūm, reinterpreted the Shabazian corpus as being fundamentally philosophical. Qāfiḥ's own role in modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism also influenced his vision of this corpus. Since kabbalistic esotericism was, for him, no longer a mark of holiness, the elaborate ritual surrounding the performance of Shabazian poetry elevated it. Such poetic orthopraxy was bolstered by the needs of a community that sought to preserve its distinct identity in an old-new society.

PART FOUR

ḤUMAYNĪ AND MODERNITY

CHAPTER SEVEN

ḤUMAYNĪ POETRY AND REVOLUTION IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY YEMEN

A Strange Encounter in the Poet's Paradise

In 1981, the Yemeni poet Aḥmad al-Shāmī (d. 2005) published a humorous play entitled *The Trial in the Poets' Paradise* (*al-muḥākamah fī jannat al-shuʿarāʾ*). Al-Shāmī's play served as an elaborate vehicle for a lively, polemical, and wide-ranging exploration of issues he saw as central to the state of poetry in the Arab world from a very conservative standpoint.[1] Shāmī penned his play as a creative response to an article by Aḥmad al-Muʿallimī, called "A Frightening Nightmare" (*kābūs murʿib*), that appeared in the weekly supplement to the Yemeni newspaper *al-Thawrah* and in the magazine *The Yemeni Journey* (*al-Masīrah al-yamaniyyah*) in March of 1980.

In the play, Muʿallimī, who invokes Imām Aḥmad as an arbiter of good taste in poetry as a means of accusing al-Shāmī of being a reactionary, inadvertently grants the deposed sovereign citizenship in the Poets' Paradise. The national and religious makeup of the highest levels of the paradisaical bureaucracy point to the strong bond between the Poets' Paradise and Yemen. The President, Imrūʾ l-Qays, refers with pride to his Yemeni roots, while poets like the seventeenth-century poet al-Ḥasan al-Habal and the twentieth-century poet Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Zubayrī (d. 1965), both among the highest ranks of the celestial pantheon, are native Yemenis. Shīʿīs, notably al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and al-Mutanabbī, also play prominent roles. Readers of al-Shāmī's nonfictional book, *Qiṣṣat al-adab fī l-yaman*, will recognize the claim that the vast majority of poets throughout the history of Arabic literature have been Yemenis. In this context, al-Maqāliḥ's statement in the play,

[1] Al-Shāmī was Imām Aḥmad's ambassador to the United Kingdom in the early 1960s and later the foreign minister of the Royalists. R.B. Serjeant, "The Yemeni Poet al-Zubayrī and his Polemic against the Zaydī Imāms," in *Arabian Studies* 5 (1979): 94.

"the issue of poetry in Yemen is the issue of poetry in the rest of the Arab countries," acquires additional resonance.[2]

Al-Shāmī does not treat the issue of vernacular poetry at length. Nevertheless, his play bears directly on the question of *ḥumaynī* poetry's fate in modern Yemen. He quotes a number of *ḥumaynī* compositions and attributes them to a poet named ʿAbdallah al-ʿAnsī, who provides comic relief in the play. In the opening act, which is a recapitulation of Muʿallimī's "Frightening Nightmare" article, Imām Aḥmad reigns supreme over Yemen once again. The Imām tells a shaken ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ that he "was impressed by [his] invaluable study of *ḥumaynī* poetry in Yemen."[3] This moment may simply constitute literary revenge; in the book to which the imaginary Imām referred, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah fī l-yaman*, al-Maqāliḥ singled out al-Shāmī as representing a "crisis of metered poetry" (*azmat al-shiʿr al-ʿamūdī*).[4] The Imām is made to say "*ḥumaynī*," disregarding al-Maqāliḥ's argument for the adoption of the term "*shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*," perhaps deliberately.

The Imām's appreciation of *ḥumaynī* poetry may make sense as well within the context of Yemeni politics: *ḥumaynī* poems, treating light and escapist themes like love or humor, were largely penned by the aristocrats (*sayyid*s and *qāḍī*s) who benefited most from the Imāmic regime. Many poems even derived their entertainment value from exploiting the geographical, economic, and ethnic differences in Yemeni society. With words drawn from Yemeni dialects, *ḥumaynī* poetry possessed an insular character. As regional literary artifacts, they would have been lucky to find small audiences in elite Highland sitting rooms, let alone in other Arab countries.

Ḥumaynī poetry became a field for contesting a Yemeni national identity and played a role in the leadup to the overthrow of the Imāms. ʿAbd al-Ilāh al-Aghbarī and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, jailed for their involvement in the 1948 coup, passed the time compiling the nineteenth-century poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī's *ḥumaynī dīwān*.[5] The *Ghināʾiyyāt* of poet ʿAbbas al-Daylamī showed a *ḥumaynī* poetry

[2] Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Shāmī, *Muḥākamah fī jannat al-shuʿarāʾ* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafās, 1981), 126.

[3] Ibid., 27.

[4] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿammiyah*, 446.

[5] Aḥmad al-Shāmī, *Min al-adab al-yamanī* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1974), 354; Taminian, "Playing with words," 138–139.

purged of frivolity.[6] One 1954 article in a Yemeni periodical suggested that *ḥumaynī* poetry anticipated twentieth-century Arabic free verse.[7]

Al-Maqāliḥ's book attempted to redeem *ḥumaynī* poetry from its past. His argument was compelling and teleological: since *ḥumaynī* poetry used the vernacular, it had always possessed a populist character. Also, it had always possessed sparks of a social conscience. It was the Revolution of 1962 that enabled this genre to achieve its full potential.

Popular Culture and Neo-Tribal Poetry

Al-Maqāliḥ's book is not without its own tensions. While the author champions local vernacular poetry, he writes classical poems exclusively. In his introduction to *Ṣawt al-thawrah: Shiʿr shaʿbī*, the collected poetry of Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl (1919–), al-Maqāliḥ chastises "the poets of the classical *qaṣīdah* in our country [who] are accustomed to professing the profoundly lowly state of the colloquial or popular *qaṣīdah*, this spontaneous voice that emanates from the emotions of the masses…."[8] He expresses his conflicted position at one point in the book: "Writing in the vernacular is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it binds the poet to vast segments of the populace, it entices easily, and sometimes it makes a connection…."[9] On the other hand, he explains, the vernacular's simplicity of expression can infect a poet's serious work—that is, his poetry in classical Arabic. This happened, says al-Maqāliḥ, to the poet ʿAlī b. ʿAlī Ṣabrah.[10]

Al-Maqāliḥ's reservations, which seem to represent a number of Yemeni intellectuals, involve a complex set of problems.[11] For him,

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[6] Taminian, "Playing with Words," 141. I was unable to consult the *Ghināʾiyyāt*.

[7] Ibid., 137–138.

[8] Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl, *Ṣawt al-thawrah: Shiʿr shaʿbī* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-kātib al-arabī, n.d.), 6.

[9] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 434.

[10] Ibid., 434–435.

[11] Ḥusayn Sālim Bā Ṣadīq expressed an opinion on this subject in his *Fī l-turāth al-shaʿbī al-yamanī* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-buḥūth al-yamanī, 1993), 29, that is worthy of comparison with al-Maqāliḥ. Bā Ṣadīq wrote: "*Ḥumaynī* poetry expressed a poet's personality, feelings, pride, and love for his country. Then *ḥumaynī* poets developed (*taṭawwara*) their poetic forms, praising others and glorifying their society with great enthusiasm. In this way the people (*al-shaʿb*) added their feelings and sentiments…." Here the author acknowledges that a change in *ḥumaynī* poetry, however subtle, did occur. Its concerns moved from the individual to the communal.

popular culture, particularly poetry, provides an expedient template for communication between enlightened men and Yemenis still mired in backwardness. Such poetry, however, must be reformed and imbued with the ideals of the Revolution. The reason for this is that the intended audience, in its underdevelopment, backwardness, and reactionary politics, is itself an obstacle to realizing the goals of the Revolution. Therefore, the reformed vernacular poetry must take on a didactic tone. I will call this type of poetry "neo-tribal" poetry because it differs substantially from the type of poetry that one finds in tribal areas.[12]

A number of tensions inhere in neo-tribal poetry; the authentic popular culture that supposedly motivates both backward Yemenis and their poetry is itself the target of reform. According to this view, vernacular poetry, in the hands of a skilled and ideologically committed poet, might work like a Trojan Horse. It would serve its progressive and dialectical purpose and then presumably disappear. Also, the division of society between the elite and the hoi polloi, the *ʿāmm* and the *khāṣṣ*, that characterized pre-Revolutionary vernacular poetry in Yemen, is preserved in this scheme, despite some reshuffling in the makeup of the elite. Imām Aḥmad's warm congratulations to al-Maqāliḥ for his work on vernacular poetry suggests this interpretation. The meeting of these two minds seems to say that for at least some Yemenis, *ḥumaynī* poetry and the revolutionary ethos did not necessarily reinforce one another.

Such observations, however, like the work of Gramsci discussed in Chapter Two, see an unnecessarily stark division between elite and popular. While a number of prominent *ḥumaynī* poets were closely associated with Yemeni governments, many of the principal purveyors of neo-tribal poetry were themselves tribesmen. Nevertheless, the Revolution and its ideology pervade modern Yemeni vernacular poetry, and the authorities made conscious decisions to sculpt policies that would bring poetry in line with that ideology.[13] This emerges in a passage

[12] These are the vast quantities of occasional verse of the sort studied by Flagg Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), many examples of which are preserved on audio cassettes, which lie outside the range of this work.

[13] To be sure, "the revolution" meant very different things to the governments of North Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic) and Communist South Yemen (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen). This topic merits further research. Nevertheless, both polities maintained the ideal of a unified Yemen. Poets and musicians from both North and South often expressed this ideal in the vernacular poetry, song, and writings on

from a booklet entitled *Cultural Policy in the Yemen Arab Republic* by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥaddād:

> The advent of the republic was accompanied by the promulgation of the new law on music and the arts, which not only legalized their existence but entitled them to grow and flourish. Hence they suddenly turned into one of the major weapons in the struggle to consolidate the republican regime and defend the revolution. They took their themes from the principles of the revolution, and turned them into moving strains and rhythms that fired the enthusiasm of the masses and lit the torch of national struggle.[14]

Having surveyed the poetic techniques and historical development of premodern *ḥumaynī* poetry in previous chapters, this chapter will investigate modern vernacular poetry in Yemen. Al-Maqāliḥ's teleological twentieth-century narrative of the history of *ḥumaynī* poetry obscures both ruptures in the tradition and elements of continuity. The focus of this chapter is on rediscovering them. The main sources for this investigation consist of printed *dīwān*s of several prominent and prolific Yemeni poets of the vernacular: Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl (b. 1919), Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī, (b. 1920), Nājī al-Ḥamīdī (b. *circa* 1939), and Muṭahhar ʿAlī al-Iryānī (b. 1933), as well as Yemeni works on literary history, popular culture and music.

The Four Styles

An anecdote about Imām Aḥmad's having personally approved every aircraft's take-off or landing encapsulates Highland Yemen's reputation for insularity and xenophobia. Nevertheless, foreign ideas and technologies made rapid advances in twentieth-century Yemen. The concept of "popular culture" (*al-turāth al-shaʿbī*) was, of course, a new idea. The two technological advances that exercised the most profound effect on the development of vernacular poetry in Yemen were the radio and the phonograph.

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poetry and song, discussed in this Chapter. This often took the form of verses that argued a shared past of the two Yemens, each of the two hemistiches devoted to the injustice of Imāmic rule or of British colonialism. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the distance between the rhetoric of Unification and actual Unification in 1993, especially when the speaker is a South Yemeni.

[14] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥaddād, *Cultural Policy in the Yemen Arab Republic* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982), 55.

ʿAbdallah Muḥammad "Hādī" ʿĀmir (1890/1891–1973/1974), a *ḥumaynī* poet who worked as a supervisor of merchants in Ṣanʿāʾ, wrote at least one poem that was inspired by a song he heard on the Adeni radio station.[15] He also devoted a considerable portion of his *dīwān* to riddles he had heard on "London radio." ʿĀmir composed a humorous poem on the occasion of his first encounter with this device in 1930/1931. His friend Ḥusayn al-Qarsh's radio "broadcasts a non-Arabic babble that could suffocate a man—it sounds like a dog stuck in a well or a wild cat being beaten" (*mudhīʿ aʿjam yughamm al-rūḥ hidārih / ka-annuh kalb hānib wasṭ masqā / wa-ṣawtuh mithlamā labj al-namārih*).

The topic of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry is difficult to separate from its musical accompaniment. Imām Yaḥyā, whose vehement opposition to musical performance recalls that of Imām al-Qāsim the Great in the seventeenth century, and the founder of the Zaydī state, the Imām al-Hādī, before him, permitted certain forms of music to be broadcast, among them the so-called "Ṣanʿānī singing" (*al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*) that relied almost exclusively upon *ḥumaynī* poetry for its lyrics. Nevertheless, most writers, Yemeni and non-Yemeni, rightly point to Yaḥyā's crackdown on music and musicians as having caused the center of *ḥumaynī* poetry to move south to British-controlled Aden.

A wide variety of musical influences characterized Aden in the 1930s and 1940s. The regional Yemeni musical traditions of people from Laḥj, Yāfiʿ, Ḥaḍramawt, and Highland Yemen, newly arrived in the port city, interacted with the music of Indian theatrical troupes, Indian film soundtracks, patriotic English songs, and the innovative Egyptian music broadcast by Nasser's "Voice of the Arabs" (*Ṣawt al-ʿarab*). The increasing popularity of the phonograph, a large number of listeners interested in Yemeni music in Yemen and abroad, and the activities of both local and foreign record companies quickly led to the emergence of a vigorous music industry.[16] By the 1950s, Aden had become the second-largest center of musical recording in the Middle East.[17]

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[15] ʿAbdallah Muḥammad ʿĀmir, *Min Shiʿr al-ḥumaynī al-ṣanʿānī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-ḥayāh, 1973), 18. The original title of the work is *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī l-ḥawādith wa l-nawādir li l-adīb al-shāʿir ʿabd allāh bni muḥammad ʿāmir*.

[16] The most comprehensive discussion of these developments is Flagg Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, 225–227.

[17] Ibid., 227.

The popularity of Ṣanʿānī singing in the 1930s and 1940s may have stemmed from the traditional cultural dominance of the North. In the 1930s, the first commercial recordings of Ṣanʿānī song were made by the performers Ibrāhīm al-Mās (d. 1966), the son of a Kawkabānī musician exiled to Aden by Imām Yaḥyā, Ibrāhīm's brother Muḥammad, Aḥmad ʿUbayd al-Qaʿṭabī, Muḥammad Jumʿah Khān, and above all, ʿAli Abū Bakr Bā Sharaḥīl.[18]

Southern Yemen saved *ḥumaynī* poetry and its musical traditions—a point that southern Yemeni writers never seem to tire of making. Yet what exactly did this rescue entail? In "saving" it, Adenis classicized *ḥumaynī* poetry, utterly transformed its music, and generated a number of distinct regional styles. First, early recordings of Ṣanʿānī song served as models for later generations of musicians. Today, an aspiring musician in any Yemeni town might search out cassette tapes of these early performances.[19] The Adeni scholar M.A. Ghānim's anthology of *ḥumaynī* poems, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, garnered enormous popularity among amateur and professional musicians, who regarded it as a canonical work.

Yet this process of classicizing these early *ḥumaynī* songs conceals the rapid changes in their musical performance. The aforementioned Ibrāhīm al-Mās is credited with replacing the traditional leather *ṭurbī*, now a nearly extinct musical instrument, with the wooden *ʿūd*. Individual tracks etched into the 78 records that record companies used had to be less than five minutes long, meaning that the languorous suites of Ṣanʿānī singing had to become a great deal faster.[20]

Ṣanʿānī singing acquired a new cultural framework as well. At the turn of the century, a *ḥumaynī* poem would have been performed live for a small group at a Highland wedding or *qāt* chew. In 1930s Aden, Ḥaḍramī musicians recorded Ṣanʿānī songs for the small number of wealthy people in the North who owned phonographs. However, the

[18] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 25; Jean Lambert, "Musiques régionales et identite nationale," 176; Schuyler, "Music and Tradition in Yemen," 58–59; Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, 271n12.

[19] The great Ṣanʿānī singer and *ʿūd* player ʿAlī al-Ānisī, interviewed in 1980, recalled his initiation into Ṣanʿānī singing through listening to the records of ʿAlī Abū Bakr Bā Sharaḥīl, Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAntarī, "and others from among the singers in the South who produced Ṣanʿānī melod[ies], after they had learned them from the singer Aḥmad al-ʿAṭṭāb who is considered the first to bring the Ṣanʿānī melod[ies] to Aden." ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAlī al-Muʾayyad, *Ārā fī l-fikr wa l-fann: Ḥiwārāt maʿa majmūʿah min al-udabāʾ wa l-fannānīn al-yamaniyyīn wa l-ʿarab* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Dār al-Ḥikmah al-Yamaniyyah, 1989), 137.

[20] Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 176.

majority of the buyers of their records were Ḥaḍramī audiences in Ḥadramawt and Indonesia.[21] In addition, Aḥmad ʿUbayd al-Qaʿṭabī and Muḥammad Jumʿah Khān—musicians remembered as having recorded canonical versions of Ṣanʿānī songs—dabbled in Indian music, calling into question their status as stalwart guardians of received musical lore.[22]

The poet who would go on to write the most famous study and anthology of Ṣanʿānī song, Muḥammad ʿAbduh Ghānim, served as one of the principal organizers of the Adeni Music Club (*al-nadwah al-ʿadaniyyah al-mūsīqiyyah*), founded in 1947.[23] The musicians affiliated with this club were members of prominent families, had studied music in Cairo or Baghdad, and went on to serve in high positions in the People's Democratic Repubic of Yemen (PDRY). They were concerned with developing a sound that adopted the new trends in Arabic music exemplified by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in Egypt as well as lyrics distinct to Aden. (Muḥammad Murshid Nājī acknowledged later in life that much "Adeni" music imitated Egyptian music.)[24] Poets like ʿAbdallah Hādī Subayt,[25] ʿAbdallah Bā Dhīb, Muḥammad Saʿīd Jarrādah, and Iskandar Thābit, wrote poems militating against the British and their policies, and set them to the music composed by members of the Club.[26]

The new music that the Adeni Music Club pioneered presaged wider developments in Yemeni vernacular poetry. Bā Ṣadīq explains how this music served a didactic purpose:

> The new Yemeni song, like the popular song before it, participated in stimulating the valor of the masses to work, not only in the fields but

[21] Some very early recordings of Yemeni music were made by the Dutch in Indonesia. According to Nizār Ghānim, Harvard University owns copies of them. Nizār Ghānim and Khālid Muḥammad al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah al-ʿarabiyyah bayn al-yaman wa l-khalīj* (Damascus: Dār al-Jalīl, 1991), 171. Ḥaḍramīs describe such recordings as "corrupt" (*muḥarraf*). Serjeant, *South Arabian Poetry*, 51.

[22] Khān is credited with devising a musical style called "Indianized" (*muhannad*). Lambert, *La médecine de l'âme*, 181; Schuyler, "Music and Tradition in Yemen," 61. Ḥusayn Sālim Bā Ṣadīq found a song by Musʿid Aḥmad Ḥusayn al-Laḥjī in the Odeon records catalog that attacks an anonymous musician for his Indian-inspired music: "I say that you deserve this for building on a shaky foundation, You know all of the motifs [but] you babble Indian gibberish." *Fī l-turāth al-shaʿbī al-yamanī*, 118.

[23] Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, 227.

[24] Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 166–170.

[25] Ṣubayt had a regular program on the radio station "Voice of the Arabs" (*Ṣawt al-ʿarab*). Ṭaha Fāriʿ, *al-Ughniyah al-yamaniyyah al-muʿāṣirah* (Beirut: Muʾassasat dār al-kitāb al-ḥadīth, 1993), 127.

[26] See Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 166–170; Fāriʿ, *al-Ughniyah al-yamaniyyah*, 116; Bā Ṣadīq, *Fī l-turāth al-shaʿbī al-yamanī*, 32–36, 342–346.

> in various types of agriculture, co-ops, factories, facilities, workshops, laboratories, schools, and universities for the sake of a better life in a changing and developing society.[27]

Aḥmad Faḍl al-ʿAbdalī "al-Qūmandān" ("The Commandant" 1878–1937), is considered both the first modern Yemeni vernacular poet and the first Yemeni to launch a regional musical style distinct from that of Ṣanʿāʾ. In keeping with the aggressive promotion of Laḥjī exceptionalism of the British authorities and his family, al-Qūmandān composed patriotic songs that drew inspiration from local musical traditions.[28] His most famous and controversial composition is the following couplet, which comes from a love poem composed on the occasion of the repulsion of the Zaydīs (*al-zaydiyyah*) from Ḍaliʿ in 1928/1929: "O Hādī, sing a song of the nation! Sing a *dān*—what need have we of the songs of Ṣanʿāʾ, my tender golden branch?" (*ghanni yā hādī nashīd ahl al-waṭan / ghanni ṣawt al-dān / mā ʿalaynā min ghinā ṣanʿāʾ al-yaman / ghuṣn min ʿiqyān*).[29]

This couplet places the *dān*, a local musical style that is common to a much wider swathe of Yemen than Laḥj itself, in opposition to the *ḥumaynī* verse of Ṣanʿāʾ. Writing in the journal *al-Ḥikmah* in 1971, ʿUmar al-Jāwī defended al-Qūmandān's contribution to Yemeni music. Abū Bakr al-Saqqāf, however, took issue with al-Jāwī's article in *al-Kalimah* in 1977, arguing that al-Qūmandān, while a talented singer, was a pro-British, anti-*sayyid*, reactionary aristocrat.[30] Al-Saqqāf's critique of al-Qūmandān possessed far-reaching implications; by that time, a "Laḥjī style" had become a recognized component of Yemeni music and few would deny that it was largely composed of what Nizār Ghānim called "*aghānī qūmandāniyyah*."[31]

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[27] Bā Ṣadīq, *Fī l-turāth al-shaʿbī al-yamanī*, 120.

[28] Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, 232; Lambert, "Musiques régionales et identité nationale," 178; al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 451–458; Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 105–106.

[29] Aḥmad Faḍl al-ʿAbdalī "al-Qūmandān," *Dīwān al-aghānī al-laḥjiyyah* (Aden: Maṭbaʿat al-hilāl, n.d.), 35.

[30] Cited in al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 451–452. Al-Maqāliḥ cites these poems as examples of the enduring problem of Laḥjī "regionalism" (*iqlīmiyyah*) and "partisanship" (*taʿaṣṣub*).

[31] Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 106. Qūmandān's students and later generations of Laḥji singers like ʿAbdallah Hādī Subayt and others kept his legacy alive. Al-Maqāliḥ quotes a poetic debate between three non-aristocratic Laḥjī poets on the honor (*ʿirḍ*) which the colonial power bestowed upon Laḥj by inviting it to join The Federation of South Arabia. These poets describe Laḥj as a girl on the verge of marriage. Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-āmmiyah*, 456–458.

If the "Laḥjī style" was largely the innovation of one man, the same situation applied to the two other musical styles that would later, along with Ṣanʿānī singing, come to be known as the "Four Styles" (*al-alwān al-arbaʿah*) of Yemeni music. The dialect poems of a semi-legendary figure named Yaḥyā ʿUmar, a Yāfiʿī who is thought to have emigrated to India, constitute the main repertoire of the Yāfiʿī style.[32] Ḥaḍramī music, long suspected in the minds of non-Ḥaḍramī Yemenis of having been mixed with Indian music, emerged as a full-fledged "style" with the publication of the poetry of Ḥusayn Abū Bakr al-Miḥḍār in the mid-1960s.[33] Abū Bakr Sālim Bā Faqīh, a Ḥaḍramī singer who achieved stardom in Saudi Arabia, championed al-Miḥḍār's poetry.

Bā Faqīh's arrangement of a classic song from the Ṣanʿānī repertoire, "O Warbler of Wādī Dūr" (*wā mugharrid bi-wādī dūr*) by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī (d. 1726/1727), launched the most controversial experiment in twentieth-century Yemeni music. Bā Faqīh replaced the "traditional" ensemble of *ʿūd* and simple percussion with a full orchestra, thus merging the Yemeni *ḥumaynī* tradition with the modernized Egyptian school of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. According to Nizār Ghānim, this song caused a social schism between *qāt* chewers, who opposed the experimental music, and the youth, who supported it.[34] This author also supported it but his father; the elder Ghānim, did not.[35] Bā Faqīh's experimental music was continued by the *ʿūd* player Aḥmad Fatḥī.

All of the Yemeni song styles have exercised a profound influence over musical performance in the Arabian Gulf countries. To some extent, Gulf interest in Yemeni music has its roots in Yemeni emigration. It also extends to Gulf Arabs with no family ties to Yemen. Sometimes, as in the books jointly written by Yemeni musician and scholar Nizār Ghānim and Dubai scholar Khālid b. Muḥammad al-Qāsimī, this shared musical culture provides the basis for statements of solidarity. At other times, Yemenis complain of the theft of their culture at the hands of Gulf musicians and governments.

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[32] Lambert, "Musiques régionales et identité nationale," 182; Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 108–110, 182.

[33] Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 96–97; Khālid b. Muḥammad al-Qāsimī's introduction to Fāriʿ, *al-Ughniyah al-yamaniyyah*, 6.

[34] Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 95; Schuyler, "Music and Tradition in Yemen," 54–56.

[35] Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *al-Awāṣir al-mūsiqiyyah*, 160–161.

Naturally, the development of the Four Styles reflects the political realities of twentieth-century Yemen.[36] To be sure, Laḥj, Yāfiʿ, and Ḥaḍramawt had their own geographically distinct musical forms. Nevertheless, the exact definition and parameters of these distinctive styles were modern developments. Also, there are many more than four musical styles in Yemen. The Laḥjī regionalism of al-Qūmandān may have been separatist, but the musical and poetic language of national unity quickly domesticated it and called it one "style" of many.[37]

Musical difference in Yemen takes less orderly forms as well. The Tihāmah, for example, possesses a variety of musical traditions of its own which are largely incomprehensible to non-Tihāmans. Minority groups such as Jews and *akhdām* have distinctive music, and gender plays a role as well in the shaping of musical traditions across Yemen.

In addition to these factors, the regionalism that led to the creation of the Four Styles differs substantially from the regionalism of premodern *ḥumaynī* poetry and from Yemeni vernacular poetry more generally. The former emphasizes unifying factors; each region is distinctive within the broader patchwork of provinces that makes up the Yemen Arab Republic (or the PDRY, depending on where one lives). Thus, the obligatory Laḥjī song performed for guests at weddings in Ṣanʿāʾ reinforces the idea of national unity.[38] The caustic gibes launched by premodern *ḥumaynī* poets like al-Khafanjī and his circle in eighteenth-century Ṣanʿāʾ reveled in a Tower of Babel-like linguistic chaos. One can imagine that the specter of just such a situation haunted the poet ʿAbdallah al-Baraddūnī when, meditating on song in the Tihāmah, he called Yemen a place where "differences in dialects nearly make each region a people (*shaʿb*) unto themselves…."[39]

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[36] The collaboration between the singer Ayyūb Ṭārish and the poet ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Nuʿmān may point to the not too distant emergence of a fifth (official) style, that of al-Ḥujariyyah. Ghānim and al-Qāsimī, *Aṣālat al-ughniyah*, 202.

[37] The artificiality of the Four Styles is underscored by the fact that the three based in Lower Yemen revolve around a handful of contemporary musicians, while Ṣanʿānī singing draws from a centuries-old tradition and a substantial corpus of poems.

[38] The idea of "unified Yemen" developed along different trajectories and possessed different political ramifications in the YAR (North) and the PDRY (South). This example comes from the YAR.

[39] ʿAbdallah al-Baraddūnī, *Funūn al-adab al-shaʿbī fī l-yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-ḥadāthah, 1988), 331.

Revolutionary Ḥumaynī *Poetry*

Abū Bakr al-Saqqāf's objection to al-Qūmandān on the basis of his sympathy for the British is worth noting here. The PDRY government's promotion of regional folk music and vernacular poetry ran concurrent to a deliberate reversal of the British policy of fostering regional pride among local power brokers in the territories under their control. Members of the Adeni Music Club were instrumental in this regard; M.A. Ghānim became Minister of Education, singers Aḥmad Qāsim and Muḥammad Murshid Nājī each served as Ministers of Culture, and Khalīl Muḥammad Khalīl was appointed director of prisons. The Yemeni Center for Research and Studies, directed by Jaʿfar ʿAbduh al-Ẓafārī, convened conferences on popular poetry in Shabwah and in Laḥj in the 1970s and in Aden in 1980. ʿAbd al-Qādir Ṣabbān at Aden University and the Sayʾun Museum devoted a large number of studies to the popular poetry of the South.

Indeed, in the twentieth century, a barrage of new influences confronted *ḥumaynī* poetry. The phonograph brought regional musical traditions to new segments of the population, stimulating the development of a new concept of regionalism. Its technological limitations forced changes in musical performance as songs sped up in tempo and shortened to fit on record tracks. The radio exposed Yemenis to a variety of musical styles. In addition, the political realities of the time—Imāmic rule in the north and British rule in the south—stimulated the emergence of a number of regional musical-poetic trends, each of which claimed ancient pedigrees.

Vernacular poetry and its musical performance played a role in the opposition to the rule of the Imāms and to the British. The newfound desire for political poetry led to a generic transformation in Yemeni vernacular poetry. Lyrical *ḥumaynī muwashshaḥāt* rarely dealt with themes other than love or humor. On the other hand, political commentary was common to tribal poetry. Therefore, it is not surprising that vernacular poets who wrote on political subjects, such as ʿAlī Nāṣir al-Qirdaʿī, Sāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl, Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī, and Nājī al-Ḥamīdī, usually structured their poems as tribal odes rather than strophic poems. Where a typical premodern *ḥumaynī dīwān* would consist mainly of *muwashshaḥāt* with a relatively small number of *mubayyatāt* (quatrain verses) or mock tribal odes, a typical modern *ḥumaynī dīwān* will contain mostly *mubayyatāt* and tribal odes. This choice of medium has the additional effect of expressing an affinity between the poet's political platform and that of his tribal audience.

This said, many of the Adeni songs against British colonialism by the likes of Subayt, ʿAṭrūsh, and others, took strophic forms. The famous couplet by al-Qūmandān quoted earlier also came from a lyric poem. A poem by ʿAlī b. ʿAlī Ṣabrah took a different approach to the appropriation of lyric poetry for political purposes. Written during the Imāmic ban on music, this popular poem was imitated many times. The fact that it was not aired during the religious programs that broadcast Ṣanʿānī singing, al-Maqāliḥ says, was due to its "open expressions" (*taʿābīruhā l-makshūfah*).

> I knock on your door with a trembling heart, you will never again tell me "you are loved by God,"
> You left me angry and weak-minded as if I was one who did not belong to the community of God,
> You greet and make blandishments to my brothers but to me you merely mention God,
> You strut before the people like a soft gazelle and when you appear before me you are God's innocent creature,
> You make the emaciated one turn around and around until he perishes—like the butterfly, the best creation of God,
> Perhaps you have one other than me enchanted with you, who has made me disappear from your heart—fear God's wrath!
> Though your body stands upright (*ʿadl*) you are unjust—you are tender of form with a heart like the fury of God,
> Would that there was a just law and regime in Taʿizz! You will not be caught until you meet God.[40]

The final line of this poem brazenly indicts Imām Aḥmad and his regime. The "open expressions" that al-Maqāliḥ observes seem to revolve around the identification of this Imām and the beloved. Ṣabrah's poem transforms the beloved's cruelty towards his lover into a political statement. Each line ends with the word "God," perhaps emphasizing Imāmic rule's reliance upon a theological justification. By the end of the poem, however, the gap between that justification and God's actual will becomes clear; rather than standing behind the Imām, God will punish him. The beloved's hunger calls to mind the famines which opponents of the regime thought were a direct result of the Imāms' rule. At the same time, Imām Aḥmad is "*dabūbat allāh*," which may have called to mind the classical Arabic "*dabūb*," meaning "fat." His love for one other than the speaker could be a reference to this Imām's alleged ties with the West, whether that meant the British in Aden or the Italian

[40] Quoted in al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 433–434.

doctor who kept him supplied with morphine. The poem does not offer a critique of the Imāmate. It merely says, in a subtle manner: "I/ we used to love you but your cruelty knows no bounds so the time has come for a change."[41]

All of these themes—God's support for the Revolution, the cruelty and greed of the Imāms, their allegiance to foreign powers, and the suffering of the masses—became staples of modern Yemeni vernacular poetry. Yet the genre of such poems changed from lyrical compositions like Ṣabrah's to the "reformed" tribal odes of Saḥlūl, Dhahbānī and Ḥamīdī.

The prototypical tribal poet of the Yemeni Revolution was ʿAlī Nāṣir al-Qirdaʿī, who in 1948 was executed along with his brother Aḥmad for having plotted to assassinate Imām Yaḥyā. Al-Qirdaʿī, who railed against the Imāms in his poetry throughout the 1930s, was imprisoned several times.[42] Many of his poems are well-known, but his *dīwān*, compiled by his nephew Jārallāh Aḥmad al-Qirdaʿī, has not been published.

Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī's voluminous body of work, much of it broadcast on the radio or published in local newspapers, was published in one volume entitled *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*. According to the abbreviated biography that Muḥammad Yaḥyā al-Masʿūdī wrote for the back cover of an early collection of his poetry, al-Dhahbānī "began composing popular *ḥumaynī* poetry before the glorious Revolution and at that time his poems dealt with love, description, and the humorous art."[43] When the Revolution broke out on September 26, 1962, "he burst into song on the Revolution, the Republic and its achievements, and the needs of the country for progress and efflorescence."[44] This short blurb articulates a view of Yemeni vernacular poetry that differs a great deal from al-Maqāliḥ's teleological scheme in which the revolutionary vernacular poet is the apotheosis of the tradition. Here, the Revolution

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[41] Imām Aḥmad's men evidently searched the radio assiduously for dissent. ʿAlī al-Ānisī reported that a patriotic song that he recorded, "*Bāsam hādha l-turāb*," angered the Imām. The musician saved himself by pleading ignorance—he was simply imitating Adeni singers. Al-Muʾayyad, *Arā fī l-fikr wa-fann*, 139.

[42] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 472–478; al-Ḥārithī, *Shadwu l-bawādī*, *passim*; Lambert, "Aspects de la poesie dialectale," 71.

[43] Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī, *al-Anghām al-shaʿbiyyah (al-ḥumayniyyah) fī ẓill al-thawrah al-yamaniyyah* (Taʿizz: Dār al-qalam, 1969). The poet had a business in Aden dyeing ammunition belts before the Revolution. Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman* (No place or publisher, 1982), 58n3.

[44] Al-Dhahbānī, *al-Anghām al-shaʿbiyyah*, back cover.

occasioned a transformation of the themes of vernacular poetry and the vocation of the vernacular poet. The poetic needs of the newly liberated society had eclipsed such trivial pursuits as love, description, and humor in poetry.

The Revolution's radical break inspired al-Dhahbānī's poetry throughout his career. His poems can often be divided into "before" and "after" sections: the first details the bleak life lived by Yemenis under the Zaydī Imāms; and the second describes the Revolution's achievements and future prospects.[45]

Al-Dhahbānī's *dīwān* uses vernacular poetry to didactic ends. One poem urges caution while driving.[46] Other poems inveigh against *qāt* and cigarettes.[47] He took a keen interest in women's rights, expounding on the subject in a number of long poems.[48] Al-Dhahbānī created a character, "the daughter of Bilqīs" ("*bint bilqīs*"), who symbolized the new educated, industrious, revolutionary, and socially responsible Yemeni woman. In the Islamic tradition Bilqīs is the name given to the Queen of Sheba so the name of this character holds significance. Al-Dhahbānī refers often to the glories of ancient South Arabia, drawing from Qurʾānic anecdotage and archaeological research. He mentions the Maʾrib dam, Sabāʾ, Ḥimyar, and Qaḥṭān (the mythical ancestor of the southern Arabs), so often that Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Ṣarfī writes in the introduction to al-Dhahbānī's *dīwān* that the poet

> differs from other popular poets in his partisanship (*taʿaṣṣubihi*) to the Ḥimyarite ancestors, and in emphasizing Ḥimyarite-Sabaic nationalism and the greatness of Yemen's past in terms of its power, industry, learning, and civilization.[49]

Ancient South Arabian symbolism emerged in the writings of Yemeni Liberals (*aḥrār*) in Aden in the 1940s. Later, it became an important part of polemic against the *sayyid*s, and was encouraged by Egypt.[50] The

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[45] See the poems in al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 29–34 (this poem was translated by Serjeant in *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 559–563), 39, 109–110, 203, and 211.

[46] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 230.

[47] Ibid., 73, 160–161, 258.

[48] Ibid., 27, 29–34, 113–116, 119–121, 169–172, 183, 213, 215.

[49] Ibid., 8.

[50] The *sayyid*s claimed descent from ʿAdnān, the ancestor of the northern Arabs. Thus writers from Shāfiʿī Lower Yemen invoked Qaḥṭān and ancient South Arabian civilizations as a way of asserting their superiority over Northerners. See R.B. Serjeant, "The Yemeni Poet al-Zubayrī," 97.

revolutionaries wisely abandoned anti-*sayyid* polemic (many of them belonged to this group themselves), but the symbolism of ancient South Arabia was retained. Such symbols, however, still retain a polemical connotation. Although al-Dhahbānī used them to call for Yemeni solidarity, occasionally the sharper edges of these symbols emerged. In a poem "to Ḥāshid and Bakīl" (the two major confederations of northern tribes), composed on the occasion of the departure of the Egyptian army from Yemen in 1967, he writes:

> The history of Ḥimyar is shining gold, O Bakīl, flower of the valley, The glory of your ancestors is far in the past, Bakīl and Ḥāshid, the sons of Nādī,
> It was like the moon, high in the sky, but it was destroyed by the *madhhab* of al-Hādī,
> [Which] destroyed all of the fortresses and the dwellings, in the land of Ḥāshid and in Hamdān.[51]

In this fanciful reconstruction of ancient South Arabian history, the arrival of the founder of the Zaydī state, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn "al-Hādī ilā l-ḥaqq," to Yemen in 897 brought South Arabian civilization to an end. Here, Zaydism is the enemy of civilization.

According to the ancient South Arabian symbolism used by al-Dhahbānī, the physical locale of Maʾrib is doubly significant. It exemplifies both the glories of ancient Yemeni civilization and the locus of reactionary tribalism. The vernacular poets of the Yemeni Revolution played a prominent role in the ceremonies accompanying the rebuilding of the Maʾrib dam, finished in 1984.[52] Yemeni nationalists' rhetorical invocation of ancient South Arabia became concrete with this event. The Qurʾān mentions the Maʾrib dam and its collapse, an event presaging the fall of Arabian paganism and the coming of Islam. The fact that it was the Qurʾān that mentions it drowns out the polytheistic connotations of the symbol. In his poem on the dam, Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl compares unidentified modern enemies of the state to the mouse who, in the

[51] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 65: "*taʾrīkh ḥimyar dhahab lāmiʿ / bakīl yā zahrat al-wādī, / ajdādukum majduhum shāsiʿ / bakīl wa-ḥāshid banū nādī, / mithl al-qamar fī l-samāʾ rāfiʿ wa-kharabuh madhhab al-hādī, / kharab jamīʿ al-ḥuṣūn wa l-dūr / fī arḍ ḥāshid wa-fī hamdān*."

[52] Al-Ḥamīdī could not attend the opening ceremony but his contribution is printed in his *dīwān*, *Nafaḥāt wādī sabā: Shiʿr shaʿbī* (No place of publication, publisher, or date), 331–333.

narratives surrounding the Qurʾānic account, brought the dam down through its years of insidious nibbling.[53]

Usually, the enemies of the Revolution are described less pointedly than they are in the verses just quoted. These enemies are "backwardness" (*takhalluf*) and "*madhhab* partisanship" (*madhhabiyyah*) which are propagated by "reactionaries" (*rājiʿiyyūn*) and others who perpetuate the modes of thought and behavior that upheld the vanquished Imāmic regime. The Revolution, al-Dhahbānī's poetry makes clear, is an ongoing process. The poet was less reticent in issuing warnings about outside threats such as Saudi-Jewish conspiracies.[54] The internal enemies of the Revolution concern al-Dhahbānī. While it is clear that the various symptoms of backwardness that he decries are specific to the tribes, he is usually careful not to engage in polemic against the tribes or even against tribalism. Indeed, he professes admiration and friendship for them. In a poem to *shaykh* Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad al-Ashwal, al-Dhahbānī offers a "welcome to a brave poet who gladdens the souls of the tribesmen, a welcome from the entire nation, to one who proclaims the generous tribal spirit" (*ahlan bi-shāʿir munāḍil / ṭayyib nufūs al-qabāʾil / taḥiyyat al-shaʿb kāmil / li-man hataf bi l-qabyalah*).[55]

Continuity in Modern Ḥumaynī *Poetry*

Al-Dhahbānī's oddly contradictory position, at once a mouthpiece for tribal poetry and a warrior against tribal backwardness, calls to mind al-Khafanjī and his circle in the eighteenth century. These poets composed mock-tribal poems for their own amusement. Al-Dhahbānī, however, composed mock-tribal poems to save the tribesmen from themselves. The fact that al-Dhahbānī was at least somewhat familiar with al-Khafanjī's poetry makes this comparison especially compelling.[56]

His most famous poem, "Ṣaʿdah has fallen," (*saqaṭat ṣaʿdah*) laments the enormous cost in life and property in the Republican's battle for the city of Ṣaʿdah after the leaders of the opposition had already fled to

[53] Saḥlūl, *Ṣawt al-thawrah*, 295.
[54] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 24.
[55] Ibid., 139.
[56] He presents a curious version of a couplet by al-Khafanjī in 216 and makes reference to "the prophet Shaghdar" on 218. This is probably none other than al-Khafanjī's companion, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad "Shaghdar."

Cairo. It is a *muʿāraḍah* of an often imitated poem by Aḥmad b. Sharaf al-Dīn "al-Qārrah" on a chaotic situation in nineteenth-century Yemen when a number of men claimed the Imāmate at once.[57] Although al-Qārrah's nineteenth-century poems inveigh against tribesmen, al-Dhahbānī's poem does not. In his encyclopedic work, *Hijar al-ʿilm wa-maʿāqiluhā fī l-yaman*, Qāḍī Ismāʿīl al-Akwaʿ explains that al-Khafanjī and al-Qārrah erred in mocking tribesmen, who were "the source of good for the people of Yemen" and "the majority of the population."[58] These poets "possessed a chauvinistic tendency (*nazʿah ʿunṣuriyyah*) that accurately reflected the politics of Imāmic rule."[59]

Al-Dhahbānī shows an extensive familiarity with the premodern tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Some of his poems, notably his humorous compositions written for *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, apply the "before and after" formula to a traditional theme: food.[60] The strong association between *ḥumaynī* poetry and weddings drives several poems in which the Revolution is personified as a bride.[61]

The mosques of Ṣanʿāʾ speak to one another in another poem, a clear echo of the famous poem by al-Khafanjī on this topic.[62] Al-Dhahbānī belonged to Banū Ḥushaysh, a tribe whose territory includes villages that al-Khafanjī derided. He wrote a poem in praise of al-ʿUdayn,[63] the village that the famous eighteenth-century *ḥumaynī* poet ʿAlī al-ʿAnsī loved to hate, and offered warm praise for a *shaykh* of Khubbān, another village marked for abuse by al-Khafanjī and others from among the *sayyid*s and *quḍāh* of Ṣanʿāʾ whose residents were proverbial for their stupidity.[64] Al-Dhahbānī describes these places in glowing terms, lauding as well the martyrs for the Revolution that each provided.

One poem of al-Dhahbānī's celebrates the opening of a maternity hospital. This poem, like many of his poems, serves a didactic purpose. Its intended audience is men. By using the "then and now" literary device (in this case "now and then"), it seeks to convince them that they

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[57] Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Suyāghī ed., *Ṣafaḥāt majhūlah min taʾrīkh al-yaman* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-buḥūth al-yamanī, 1984), 117–124; al-Akwaʿ, *Hijar al-ʿilm*, 1274–1277, 1655–1663, 1791–1792; Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 115–119.

[58] Al-Akwaʿ, *Hijar al-ʿilm*, 1665, 1668.

[59] Ibid., 1668.

[60] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 26–38 (translated in Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 313–314, 105, and 163).

[61] Ibid., 19, 61, 88.

[62] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 39.

[63] Ibid., 199.

[64] Ibid., 123.

would be well advised to entrust their wives to the care of doctors and nurses in this hospital. "Bring your wife, relax—there is no use resisting" (*nazzil zawjatek tastarīḥ, mā bish fāʾidah fī l-ʿināḍ*).[65] Treatment at the hospital is contrasted with the poor state of women's health under the Imāms. In this *mubayyat*, al-Dhahbānī describes the goings-on at a *shikmah* ceremony.[66]

Al-Khafanjī's account of such a celebration provides the plot for his misogynistic "*tafruṭah* of Bayt al-Basīs." The "*tafruṭah* of Bayt al-Basīs" describes a *shikmah* ceremony that degenerates into a pitched battle between several generations of women. The two poems merit comparison. After describing the features of the new hospital, al-Dhahbānī turns to the past:

> Back in the old days giving birth was a piece of hellfire,
> [When a woman] gave birth, she and those with her experienced a week [literally "eight days"] of labor pains,
> Her family was nearly mad and her husband was dumbfounded, where could he go?
> The infant emerged weak and as yellow as a locust,
> With heavy feeding her child had a good chance to live past his weakness,
> And she [herself] was fed three pounds of porridge until she nearly had to be leaned against the wall,
> A diffuse pain still afflicted her belly—no one could scratch it,
> She ate, then began screaming again—her belly weighed more than a ton,
> A dry bit of cake[67] stopped up her stomach like a stone,
> She sat on the elevated bed from lunchtime to evening,[68]
> The well-wisher arrives to visit her, well-dressed, proudly bearing coffee,
> If she slips a little the coffee will spill[69] and give the whole country a drink.
> As long as she sees that the guests have coffee pots she will consider the *tafruṭah* valid,
> But if she gets angry, she will swear by her right hand not to let a single one of them enter,
> They arrive, sweating through their house dresses, and the new mother wants to shout,
> All the while the newborn is screaming mightily from all of the sweat and the strife,
> She stays awake all night trying to make her child fall asleep,

[65] Ibid., 119.

[66] An exclusively female celebration for a new mother. (See Chapter Two.)

[67] "*Maʿṣūbah*" P 329: "A parturient women is given *m.* for breakfast for forty days after childbirth."

[68] A tells me that this part of the *tafruṭah* would normally be from 3:00 to 6:00 PM.

[69] A: In Old Ṣanʿāʾ, exceptionally large and unwieldy pots of hot coffee are carried to a *shikmah* ceremony by two or more women.

Out of her utter exhaustion, she forces him to drink from a bottle[70] of clarified butter so that he will doze,
Like an opium addict she stays at home, only visiting her neighbors,
A man dotes on his son—teach your wife, O serious person!
It is your responsibility to see that he survives—teach your wife and your baby will rise up,
She nourishes him with hellfire[71]—[that is] when she nurses him he nearly suffocates,
He remains [draped] over her breasts all day, even while she sleeps,
[Indeed,] the vanquished regime has been crushed and we are finished with living in darkness,
My grandmother told me what giving birth was like in her time,
She said that my maternal aunt held a *tafruṭah* for a week under fifty days,
How my paternal aunt cried out when the girls of the area showed up,
It was the pretty virgins' place to come to the house of the parturient woman.[72]
O lord of the heavens, O answerer [of prayers], set us on the course to do right,
Show mercy to him who is far and him who is near, and make us succeed,
Help him who makes his living as a doctor to be free of the needs of every man and woman,
I will say one thing loudly: May medicine live long into perpetuity!

In this poem, the speaker portrays the female protagonist's woes, particularly her health problems and those of her child, with sympathy. In al-Khafanjī's eighteenth-century poem, the new mother mentions the newborn's poor health in order to drive the horde of rowdy women from her presence.

She turned around and said, screaming: "rescue my son Ṣalāḥ! Don't tread on him. He was already ill in his father's house, as his sagging shoulders [show],
Why all of this rudeness? You should show some self-respect,
All of your coughing [is unwanted], Don't come back because your faces have changed."

[70] "*Manshūq*" p. 486: "small copper container with long, sharp, curved lip, from which a baby sucks heated milk, ghee, or diluted porridge."

[71] The poet explains this image in the following way: "she nurses her son while she is cooking dinner and her body is inflamed from the heat of the fire." Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 121n2.

[72] The poet explains that "the custom was that a virgin would not enter the place of the *tafruṭah*."

The fundamental difference between the two poems is the didacticism of al-Dhahbānī's poem.[73] Nevertheless, both poems stage a communication between a male speaker and a male audience concerning the ways of women. Al-Khafanjī's poem is unapologetically misogynistic and ends with order having been restored by the women's husbands. Al-Dhahbānī's poem, while expressing concern for public health, places much of the blame for perpetuating the old, unhealthy ways on women. The woman described in the poem is superstitious and tradition-bound. Rather than being dragged unwillingly to the *shikmah*, she is sure to check whether or not the guests bring the ceremonial coffee pot. The new mother exposes her baby to a gaggle of sweaty women, force feeds him ghee and otherwise endangers his well-being by nursing him while she is hot and dirty from cooking. She also sleeps with the baby in her bed. Is it her fault that she is a virtual shut-in who perpetuates backward customs? This is not clear from the poem. It can be attributed in a general way to "the vanquished regime" (*al-ʿahd al-mubād*). Nevertheless, here, women are the primary agents of backwardness. The husband and the state are responsible for rescuing them and their offspring from this lowly condition.

In sum, the break that al-Dhahbānī depicts between the Imāmic *ancien regime* and the new age of the Revolution, the old world of al-Khafanjī's elitist vernacular poetry and the new vernacular poetry of progress, is not so sharp after all. Al-Dhahbānī's poetry represents a continuation of the *ḥumaynī* tradition in ways of which he may not have been aware.

Al-Dhahbānī's poetry shows an affinity with the old poetic world in another respect as well. Much of his poetry praises the Revolution and its wise architects. His poems that celebrate building projects, a sewing factory, a waterworks, and a school, call to mind the eighteenth-century poems of ʿAlī b. Ṣāliḥ b. Abī l-Rijāl, which mark the building projects

[73] The radio program "*Musʿid wa-musʿidah*," written by the Ṣanʿānī writer ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muṭahhar, exemplifies the didactic approach to Yemeni popular culture. The program's short segments feature a conversation between a middle-aged couple, largely in Ṣanʿānī Arabic, full of local proverbs, witticisms, and snippets of popular poetry. Each dialogue has a message. I have sorted my collection of these programs with the following synopses: "do not let children put things in their mouths"; "do not put food in dirty containers"; "do not urinate in the street"; "do not nurse babies with dirty breasts" (see above); "save the Bosnian Muslims"; "do not use pesticides"; "treat your daughters the way you treat your sons"; "guns are dangerous (for children)"; etc. Janet Watson collected and translated fifty of these programs, published as *Social Issues in Popular Yemeni Culture* (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-Sabahi Press, 2002).

of his master, the Imām al-Mahdī "Ṣāḥib al-Mawāhib." In the premodern period, the stigma against the vernacular made it an inappropriate medium for such topics as panegyric. Panegyric only emerges as a major theme in Yemeni vernacular poetry in the modern period. This is the result of the new importance placed on vernacular poetry as a means of communication between the state and its citizens.

Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Sahlul, who in 1983 composed a poem for a meeting of the local branch of the popular council (*muʾtamar al-shaʿbī al-farʿī*) in al-Bayḍāʾ, addresses this question. A few caustic verses speak to the hoary issue of panegyric poetry's unsavory financial aspect:

> If you see that old age and decrepitude have affected me a little, know that my voice has gone out like cannon shots and continues,
> My people have told me this—they informed me—I am not ignorant!
> Where is literature that was like a pickaxe that shattered mighty rocks,
> That was put forth during afternoon *qāt* chews and evening gatherings to elevate the atmosphere?
> Today the foolish poets do it to make money,
> How many a poet brings forth odes in order to be given a present?
> I hold my tongue and curse him [silently] if, one day, he composes a poem in the service of the people…
> Ibn Saḥlūl says: One who boasts can boast but the situation today is clear,
> The only revolutionary is he who is stout and reputable, who parted from his ox on plowing day,
> A free, upright and revolutionary man, showing Ḥimyarite courage,
> On a day when the taste of poetry was more bitter than cups of colocynth,
> A day when the worst enemies of mankind fought the Septemberist forces,
> A day when bombs, bullets and sparks, jumped like *qaliyyah*,[74]
> And he who stuck his head up to declaim a poem might get hit with a bullet or a piece of shrapnel…[75]

Saḥlūl contrasts the Revolutionary tribal poetry that he pioneered with the trivial concerns of younger poets before launching into the narrative of the 1962 revolution and his role in it. This poem, typical of Saḥlūl's poetry, contains an intertextual reference to a poem of the premodern *ḥumaynī* tradition. Ṣaḥlūl addresses the town of al-Bayḍāʾ, a town that bordered the PDRY, as "gazelle of the East" (*ghazāl al-mashriqiyyah*). He also uses the "*alif-mim*" definite article to give the poem a local flavor.

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[74] Dish consisting of meat cooked in vinegar to preserve it, fatty meat, or toasted grain (in the Tihāmah). Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 555.

[75] Saḥlūl, *Ṣawt al-thawrah*, 252.

A *ḥumaynī* love poem by the nineteenth-century poet Aḥmad b. Sharaf al-Dīn "al-Qārrah" on a Bedouin girl, one of the most famous Ṣanʿānī songs recorded many times by Yemeni singers, must have been in Saḥlūl's mind. Al-Qārrah writes, "I said: 'what is [your] name and what country do you hail from?' She said: "Ghazāl—my root[s are] in the East and it is my lot." The poem emphasizes the girl's Eastern accent with words characteristic of that dialect and with the "*alif-mim*" definite article. In Saḥlūl's poem, the feminine imagery is transferred to the town of al-Bayḍāʾ and the local dialectical items used to describe the Revolution. In keeping with al-Dhahbānī's vision of the Revolution as a bride, Saḥlūl's poem tells the love story between one town and its Revolution.

Muṭahhar al-Iryānī—The Apotheosis of Ḥumaynī?

Muṭahhar al-Iryānī self-consciously combines the premodern traditions of Yemeni vernacular poetry with the new ethos of the Revolution in his *ḥumaynī dīwān, Fawq al-jabal*.[76] His poems differ substantially from the neo-tribal poems of Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Saḥlūl, Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī, and Nājī al-Ḥamīdī. Many of al-Iryānī's poems are *muwashshaḥāt* and are accompanied by dense and informative footnotes about Yemeni dialects.[77] Al-Iryānī's collection, which includes several ponderous operettas, reflects the author's sophistication and his love of the colloquial. The cover of the book shows a factory and a helmeted soldier—both emblems of progress and nation-building. Al-Iryānī devotes many poems to a particular profession or economic class, each of which represents some essential aspect of the modern Yemeni experience. These include the soldier, the émigré, and the agriculturalist.

With good reason, prominent modern Yemeni poets and literary critics like ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ and ʿAbdallah al-Baraddūnī considered his work the apogee of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry. His "Song of the Émigré" (*ughniyat al-muhājir*) tells the tale of a man who found his

[76] Saʿīd al-Shaybānī and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Nuʿmān are also educated urban poets who used the vernacular. I have not been able to find many examples of their work.

[77] Al-Iryānī is an expert in Yemeni dialects, having authored a dictionary that I have used throughout this book and having assisted in the preparation of Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī's dictionary: *Shams al-ʿulūm*.

way to East Africa after a career as a sailor, having left Yemen during the Imām's rule. It invokes the Imām's capricious violence with a colloquial word for destruction (*fanā*) and expands the reference in a note. By using the word "towns" (*bulūd*), which is specific to al-Ḥujariyyah, a town that lost high numbers to emigration, al-Iryānī lends a degree of subtlety and authenticity to this common theme. It also incorporates a poignant quotation of a famous song sung by emigrants in its closing strophe. Al-Iryānī's poems, replete with details about Yemeni folk culture, satisfy readers' curiosity about this social stratum.

Al-Iryānī was committed to many aspects of both folk and modern culture. He introduces his strophic poem, "Our meeting and evening soiree were wonderful" (*ṭāb al-liqā wa l-samar*), as "a song of love and coffee."

> Our meeting and evening soiree were wonderful when Pleiades was conjoined [with the moon].[78]
> One thousand welcomes to the November conjunction!
> Let's go, youths, the wondrous weather calls to us.
> Let us sing—whether of love or of our highest hopes,
>
> Today the evening soiree was wonderful when the moon rose.
> Picking the bush was lovely while Time showed its teeth [in a smile],
>
> O coffee guardian, rejoice, for coffee season is nearing.
> Why do the sparrows in the garden's foliage reel drunkenly?
> Did they taste the first cup from the crop's pressings?
> Did they continue enchanting existence with the sweetest melody?
>
> He said: "Deliver a message: the good news of the first fruit,
> It appeared as the color of the bashfulness on the cheeks of the beautiful maidens,
>
> O fields of coffee, O most wonderful of abodes, the harvest was wonderful.
> O green brocade, interspersed with agates of Yemen,
> O enchantment without equal in existence.
> How lovely are the strings of scarlet [berries] on the drooping branches,
>
> Yemeni coffee—O pearls! O treasure atop a bush!
> He who tends to you does not want, nor is he stricken with humiliation,
>
> Come to us, rural youths (*shabāb al-rīf*) from every town (*bandar*),
> Let us enjoy pleasant nights of love and abundant virtue,
> By means of [different] types of art that this people [has practiced] since the time of Ḥimyar,

[78] "*ʿAlā qirān al-thurayyā*"—"*qirān*" is a unit of measurement from the lunar agricultural calendar.

Bringing forth the "*bālah*" and the "*muhayyad*" and the "*maghnī*" while night shows its favor,

O Lord, how wonderful evening soiree and conversation are in our rural areas,
How lovely are the songs of the maidens, repeating the sweetest tunes…

This poem refers self-consciously to Yemeni agriculturalists' system of star-lore, and speaks of various genres of work songs, such as *bālah* and *muhayyad*. At this point, the poem turns to love. The following section uses the lexicon of lyric poetry and its *dramatis personae*, such as the envier and the slanderer, to describe coffee and its cultivation. Other Yemeni poets who described stimulants also made ample use of this technique.

I am afflicted with love for a slender one of surpassing beauty,
Sweet lips, magical eyes, a sweet enchanter,
I sought to approach him but they said "drawing close will be costly",
I said: "Give me a fixed appointment—there can be nothing better",
They said: "the conjunction of the moon and Pleiades at dawn,
[On] the fifteenth day of November",

Our union was perfect, my beloved, but "something spoiled it",[79]
How many times I said, "Would that all of time was [harvest] season",
Today the harvest festival made its first imprints manifest,
The good news of the first fruits [written in] the color of a scarlet ruby,

Our meeting was arranged and carried out on a bright and beautiful day,
Of the festival of the fruit, in the shadow of this conjunction [of the moon and Pleiades],

I endured more than the long-suffering stone [at the foot of] a waterfall,
No one tasted my punishment, sleeplessness, or pain like mine,
I spent the year longing for the passion-inducing lover.
I count the days and the hours and track the moments,

After emaciation and insomnia, the lover's patience triumphed,
A patience that attained its goal, despite the envious and the slanderer[s],

We will meet, love of my heart, in the broad valley,
We will pick, be happy, and be blessed in the hours of our meeting,
All the while a bird will hear, singing to us [along] when it chirps,
And we will hear the felicitations of the comrades working in the field,

Congratulations to him who waits patiently for the anticipated moment,
An auspicious star shines for him and he realizes his hopes,

[79] A: "*lā khayr qādim*"—an expression.

Come with me, love of my heart, let us renew the old customs,
With this happy windfall we will build a hut[80]
That holds two hearts, blazing with an eternal love,
To which we will seek shelter in fidelity and in love from every slanderer,

O hut of ours, O home, it will protect you from every ill,
O cradle of humanity, O loftiest allegory (*ramz asmā l-maʿānī*).[81]

This section of the poem relies on equivalent meanings to keep the reader guessing about the identity of the beloved. For example, is the slender, scarlet-lipped lover a person or the coffee bush with its red fruit? The images of trysts in the fields, and expressions like, "Time showed its teeth," [sparrows who] "enchant existence" and "the color of bashfulness," betray the strong influence of Romantic poetry on this poem. Al-Iryānī's poem also possesses a didactic dimension. Coffee will bring financial prosperity, but the farmer—like the forlorn lover—must show patience in cultivating it.

One of the reasons Muṭahhar al-Iryānī's vernacular poetry differs significantly from the poetry of the neo-tribal poets, Saḥlūl, al-Dhahbānī, and al-Ḥamīdī, is his background: his brother, ʿAbd al-Karīm, served in many high positions in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), including as Prime Minister. As an educated urban poet, al-Iryānī seems not to consider his audience to be fellow tribesmen in need of reform. His audience is national and regional. As a member of the revolutionary aristocracy, his close proximity to the drafters of cultural policy perhaps allowed him a bit more space for artistic experimentation. This point emerges when one compares al-Iryānī's work to more straightforwardly ideological poems by Saḥlūl, al-Dhahbānī, and al-Ḥamīdī. The diffusion of al-Iryānī's patriotic poems seems to have been accomplished by prominent musicians like ʿAlī al-Simmah, ʿAlī al-Ānisī, and Ayyūb Ṭārish, all of whom, the *dīwān* notes, performed his poems.

ʿAbdallah Salām Nājī and the Popular

ʿAbdallah Salām Nājī is Muṭahhar al-Iryānī's Adeni counterpart: a widely read, widely traveled urban poet. Nājī's works, particularly his

[80] Understanding "'*ish*" as a synonym for "'*ishshah*." A: it can also mean "a field."
[81] Al-Iryānī, *Fawq al-jabal*, 50–54.

epic poem, *Nashwān wa l-raʿiyyah*, combine free verse and dialect.[82] One poem of Nājī's, a meditation on the theater composed in the dialect, appeared in a Yemeni newspaper and is quoted by al-Maqāliḥ.[83] One of the most compelling theoretical discussions of vernacular poetry in modern Yemen comes from an interview with this poet. The interviewer, Ibrāhīm al-Maqḥafī, asks: "For you, does the new poem derive sustenance from the popular poem or is the reverse true?"[84]

Nājī concedes that "there are difficulties that make communicating with the people in the dialect the easiest connection."[85] Nevertheless, he rejects the identification of classical poetry with seriousness of purpose and the vernacular with simplicity. He concludes,

> The popular poem is not connected to the language in which it is written. Poetry's popularity (*shaʿbiyyat al-shiʿr*) is connected to classical Arabic in the same way that it is connected to the dialect. This means 'popularity' describes the horizontal diffusion of a poetic work among the people.[86]

That is to say, Nājī's poetry is popular in that it deals with issues of concern to society, not because he writes parts of them in the dialect. Dialect does not carry a social stigma. In fact, Nājī writes that "poems in the Yemeni dialect have proven themselves to be exceedingly powerful in embracing humanistic content—their success is no less than that of the classical Arabic poem.…"[87]

Nājī tries to avoid portraying the Yemeni vernacular as classical Arabic's rustic cousin. For him, the "dialect poem is its new form." In other words, a free verse dialect poem along the lines of the author's *Nashwān wa l-raʿiyyah*, like the neo-tribal odes of Saḥlūl, al-Dhahbānī, and al-Ḥamīdī, becomes a vehicle for administering reform to people in need of it.

Nājī's more subtle approach to questions of dialect in poetry and popular culture culminates in his final point:

> The rural areas of Yemen (*al-rīf al-yamanī*) will continue to influence many styles of cultural and literary transactions, as well as the acquisition

[82] Other than the excerpts printed in al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah fī l-yaman*, I was unable to consult this work.
[83] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 443–444.
[84] Ibrāhīm al-Maqḥafī, *Ḥiwār maʿa arbaʿ shuʿarāʾ min al-yaman* (Cairo: Dār al-hanā li l-ṭibāʿah, 1975), 120.
[85] Ibid., 121.
[86] Ibid., 120.
[87] Ibid., 121.

> of academic culture, despite the distance that separates them from rural society, for a person's childhood is a memory that is etched on his life until old age and the final journey. Childhood leaves an important mark on the achievements of a poet, literary man, or artist…

Here, Nājī breaks down the distinction between rural and urban on several levels. The rural areas and their folkways influence the supposedly cosmopolitan culture and literature of the cities. Even "academic culture," in which the classical Arabic ode presumably takes an honored place, is subject to the influence of the rural. In addition, for many urban writers like Nājī, the reality of rural life is associated with childhood. Does a writer's "maturity" necessitate a break with the rural and all that it signifies, or must he coexist with it throughout his career? Nājī, it seems, at least at the point in his life when he was interviewed, chose the latter position. His poems, switching back and forth between Arabic registers as *ḥumaynī* poetry has always done, embody this tension.

Introductions to collections of vernacular poetry—a number of which were written by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ—emphasize the individual poets' continuity with the tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Popular poetry after the Revolution accorded the neo-tribal poetry of Saḥlūl, al-Dhahbānī, and others, a place of prominence. Maqāliḥ writes: "After the Revolution, the popular ode played an exceptional role in broadcasting the denunciation of traitors and [making the public aware of] conspiracies."[88] However, the extension of the *ḥumaynī* rubric over such genres as tribal poetry and work poems, a function of the new concept of popular poetry, led to some awkward maneuvering. In his introduction to Saḥlūl's collected works, al-Maqāliḥ argues that the *ḥumaynī* rubric has always embraced such material.[89]

Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to argue for the aesthetic merit of Saḥlūl's poetry. "It is poetry that lacks the delicacy and musicality of *ḥumaynī*, its variegated rhyme schemes and its meters, but it compensates for this with its rough rhythm, its fiery stance, and its truthful adherence to reality."[90] But what is the "reality" that Saḥlūl's poetry expresses?

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[88] Saḥlūl, *Ṣawt al-thawrah*, 6.
[89] Ibid., 14–15.
[90] Ibid., 16.

Nājī al-Ḥamīdī: Neo-Tribal Poetry at the Close of the Twentieth Century

In answering this question, we turn to the *dīwān* of the neo-tribal poet Nājī al-Ḥamīdī, *The Breezes from Wādī Sabāʾ*, which includes an introduction, written in 1988, by the poet's son ʿAlī. Al-Ḥamīdī, the son of a *shaykh* of Khawlān, spent his childhood as a hostage (*rahīnah*) in the Imām's palace in Ṣanʿāʾ. After the Revolution, he became a local politician, serving as the representative of Banū Ḍubyān to the Khawlān Cooperation Council (*hayʾat taʿāwun khawlān*) in the General Union of Civil Cooperation Councils for Development (*al-ittiḥād al-ʿāmm li-hayʾāt al-taʿāwun al-ahlī li l-taṭwīr*).

Ḥamīdī recalls his initiation into poetry in the following manner:

> [I owe] my understanding of the way things are, especially after the Revolution, to the companionship of the radio and the efforts of those who worked at Yemen Arab Broadcasting. Here I must record my amazement with the great poet Ṣāliḥ Saḥlūl, whose odes were arrows that stuck in the necks of the enemies of the Revolution and the Republic.

Al-Ḥamīdī's recollections show how YAR government efforts to promote popular poetry resonated with one Yemeni. Their presentation of the specific vision of reality championed by the bureaucrats and poets of the Revolution, through the language and form of tribal poetry, convinced at least one tribesman. Ḥamīdī's son ʿAlī explained the reasons behind the printing of his father's *dīwān* by saying: "Most of [my father's] odes revolved around the homeland and the people, and their problems."[91] The elder Ḥamīdī "urged throwing off tribal partisanship (*al-taʿaṣṣubāt al-qabaliyyah*)" and took a keen interest in the eradication of "other social diseases inherited from the vanquished regime."[92]

Al-Ḥamīdī fashioned himself as a neo-tribal poet. The romanticization of agriculture that played a part in the poetry of al-Dhahbānī and al-Iryānī can be found in al-Ḥamīdī's poetry as well. He also took a keen interest in decrying *qāt* cultivation and consumption. A boasting match (*mufākharah*) between *qāt* and oranges ends with *qāt*'s decisive defeat.[93] The poem casts contemporary debates over the social costs of *qāt* use in the centuries-old form of the *mufākharah*. Al-Ḥamīdī,

[91] Al-Ḥamīdī, *Dīwān wādī sabāʾ*, 12.
[92] Ibid., 12.
[93] Ibid., 34–37.

like al-Dhahbānī, shows a familiarity with premodern traditions of vernacular poetry in Yemen.

Another poem of al-Ḥamīdī's portrays a dispute between a wealthy *qāt* monger (*muqawwit*) and an impoverished chewer (*mukhazzin*). Using metaphors for the emaciated lover, the poem describes the desperate chewer. Combining description of the chewer's addiction to the leafy stimulant (particularly his eschewal of food for himself and his family) and statements of the drug's deleterious effects on society, the poem offers a dramatic and pathos-laden picture of a *qāt* addict and his downfall. An investigator summoned to adjudicate the violent dispute between the two men concludes that the only solution to their problem is to uproot all *qāt* trees.[94]

A love poem al-Ḥamīdī wrote in 1980 about "a girl of Yemen" (*bint al-yaman*) takes a novel approach to a stock theme in *ḥumaynī ghazal*: the beloved's rustic accent.

> When we paused and I spoke to her[95] and she spoke to me, I said "O brown-skinned one where is your homeland?,
> Are you from Taʿizz or from Ṣanʿāʾ, you who has shot me through with two arrows from her eyes?
> Your accent is of Radāʿ but your look is that of one from al-Bayḍāʾ. Alas! My sufferings are growing, you with the henna-painted hands,
> Are you of Haṣīṣ[96] of ʿAzzān,[97] of Dabbān,[98] or are you a noble lady among gazelles,
> Are you of Aḥrī or of Bayḥān? My love for you that burned me as one flame and now has become two,
> Are you of Ibb or of Baʿdān?[99] How many are the seductive women of Shaʿir![100]
> Are you of Yāfiʿ or Radfān, doe-eyed one, or is your homeland the two Kawrs?[101]

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[94] Ibid., 67.

[95] The masculine is conventionally used to describe women in poetry (and sometimes in conversation!). Usually I translate it as "he" because the beloved may well be male. In this case, however, the introduction to the poem makes clear that the beloved is female.

[96] A tribe of al-Bayḍāʾ. Al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yamaniyyah*, 751.

[97] There are eight ʿAzzāns but this would make the most sense if it was the Āl ʿAzzān of al-Bayḍāʾ. Ibid., 600.

[98] A tribe of al-Bayḍāʾ. Ibid., 326.

[99] A place near Ibb. Ibid., 124.

[100] A Place near Ibb. Ibid., 454.

[101] Near al-Bayḍāʾ. Ibid., 668.

Are you of Qafr,[102] Shayʿān,[103] Khubbān, Saddah,[104] or of Ḥaqlayn?[105]
Are you of Wuṣāb or of Hayfān,[106] you with a body like a bamboo stalk and rosy cheeks,
[Having seen] your gunny sacks for picking the blossoms of fruits, might you be of Ḥufāsh[107] or of Milḥān?[108]
Are you from al-Ḥudaydah or Jayzān,[109] you radiant one, or is your homeland the two Jawfs?
Are you of Ḥaymah, Hamdān or Kawkabān, places where all of the brown beauties live?
Are you from Nihm or Khawlān—how much meaning is invested in a fortress[110] or two!
Were you of Maswar or Kaḥlān when you called to me and answered with languorous eyes?"
She said: "approach if you wish to come before me," I came right away and we clasped hands,
"Though you may not love me I am so-and-so from such-and-such (*fulān fulānī*) O brown-skinned Yemeni woman, and my homeland is a woman's breasts!"

Here, the bewildering variety of place names are meant to make a patriotic statement by creating a verbal map of Yemen. Various aspects of the girl's appearance denote different regions, but in the end her geographical origins and vocation do not matter. She is simply a brown-skinned woman of Yemen (*asmar yamānī*) and the speaker is "so-and-so from such-and-such." What difference does it make if she is a tribal farmer of Khubbān, whose residents were mocked by Ṣanʿānīs, or a woman of the Tihāmah, whose cultural admixture with East Africa raises eyebrows? What of the historical roots of regional differences? "[H]ow much meaning is invested in a fortress or two!" (*wa-kam maʿānī ḥawāhā l-ḥuṣn wa l-ḥuṣnayn*).

Al-Ḥamīdī, a tribesman whose participation in politics depended upon his Khawlānī tribal affiliation, addresses problems associated with the tribes in a number of poems. In one, a mammoth account of a tribal war in the mid-eighties, the poet routinely falls back on the sorts of

[102] This is probably Qafr Ḥāshid. Ibid., 656.
[103] A *wādī* in Yarīm or a village near Ṣanʿāʾ. Ibid., 460.
[104] Ibid., 418.
[105] A village in Khubbānī territory. Ibid., 278.
[106] A village near al-Ḥujariyah. Ibid., 301.
[107] A mountain near al-Maḥwīt. Ibid., 277–278.
[108] Near al-Maḥwīt. Ibid., 718–719.
[109] A village in the northern Tihāmah.
[110] "*ḥuṣn*" could also mean a house in the dialect (P).

ancient South Arabian and Republican slogans used by his predecessors among the neo-tribal poets. "There is no such thing as a man of Ḥāshid, of Bakīl, or of Madḥaj," he insists three times in the poem.[111] Images from ancient Yemeni history replace tribal affiliations. The warring parties are "the sons of Sabāʾ and Ḥimyar the roots of whose lineage go back to Yaʿrub—We are the pure Arabs (*al-ʿarab al-ʿarūbah*) and, as our genealogies proclaim, the stock of Qaḥṭān."[112]

The speaker, however, is conflicted. On the one hand, he seems embarrassed by the chaos that the tribal war has wrought and painfully aware of how it is viewed by those outside of the theater of battle. "All of the masses said that we had erred in taking our blood price" (*kull al-jamāhīr qālat bi-annanā qad ghalaṭnā fī ḥaqq thawārinā*).[113] On the other hand, he identifies strongly with his own tribe and labels the problems that led to the war with such abstract terms as "ignorance" (*jahl*), "backwardness" (*takhalluf*), and "reactionism" (*rajʿīyah*), as well as pointing to the actions of several unsavory politicians. The poem's incredible length and its repetition of catch phrases seem to bury such contradictions in a mountain of verbiage.

Conclusions

I would like to conclude with a question: Does modern Yemeni vernacular poetry, whether the didactic neo-tribal odes of Saḥlūl, al-Dhahbānī, or al-Ḥamīdī, or the modernistic strophes of Muṭahhar al-Iryānī and ʿAbdallah Salām Nājī, represent a break with the *ḥumaynī* tradition, just as the Yemeni Revolution enabled history to be divided into "before" and "after"? I believe that it did. The radio and the phonograph—and, later, the cassette recorder—spurred dramatic changes to the musical performance of *ḥumaynī* poetry. The old poems of the highlands, saved by Adenis, soon had to compete with new regional musical styles.

The new vernacular poets used neo-tribal odes and strophic poems, occasionally setting them to the music of popular musicians, to combat the social ills of the pre-Revolutionary era that tribesmen, Zaydīs, women, and others perpetuated. This caused major changes in the

[111] Al-Ḥamīdī, *Dīwān wādī sabāʾ*, 155, 161.
[112] Ibid., 161.
[113] Ibid., 157.

structure and rhetoric of vernacular poetry. The poetry, once lyrical and humorous, became didactic and panegyrical. "Popular poetry" swallowed *ḥumaynī* poetry and popular poetry was official poetry. It had to possess a regional flavor, but it also had to be comprehensible and enjoyable to the largest possible number of Yemenis. The new concept of popular culture itself informed the self-conscious creations of the urban vernacular poets al-Iryānī and Nājī.

Modern Yemeni vernacular poetry also displays continuity with the past. On the intertextual level, poets make reference, ironic or otherwise, to premodern *ḥumaynī* poems. Socially, the world of poets and critics resembles that of the "vanquished regime" in more ways than most involved in it would care to admit. The composition of the new vernacular poetry offered a means of upward mobility and the new regime, like the old, needed talented panegyrists. *Ḥumaynī* poets of old mimicked the speech of tribesmen and women in a patronizing fashion. Neo-tribal poets, however noble their intentions and imaginative their efforts, also played these roles with condescension. Before the Revolution, many serious poets and critics frowned upon vernacular poetry as having been tainted by its low linguistic register (*malḥūn*), preferring the classical *qaṣīdah*. After the Revolution, many serious poets and critics frowned upon it for its coarse language and parochialism, preferring free verse.

Perhaps Aḥmad al-Shāmī, a Royalist who lived in exile in Bromley-on-Kent, had some of this on his mind when he imagined Imām Aḥmad's warm congratulations to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al- Maqāliḥ. How have other Yemenis responded to the question of change and tradition in vernacular poetry? Answering this question adequately is beyond the scope of this work, but several suggestive anecdotes will have to suffice. The patriotic Laḥjī poems of Aḥmad Faḍl al-ʿAbdalī from the 1930s were not terribly popular with ordinary Laḥjīs, who preferred his love poems (*ghazal*). When I asked a woman from Ṣanʿāʾ about al-Dhahbānī, she said that she and the people she knew preferred his humorous poems to his political poetry. The narrative of *ḥumaynī* poetry as revolutionary poetry obscures some of the branches of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. In the following anecdote, they return with alarming force.

In a rambling discussion in an entry in his dictionary, Muṭahhar al-Iryānī, the modernist poet that critics consider the virtual apotheosis of *ḥumaynī* poetry, writes the following about a poetic meter:

> This poetic meter, derived from the Khalīlian *kāmil* meter, is very widespread in extemporaneous and *ḥumaynī* poems. There are a number of melodies set to this poetic meter and a number of these songs, sung in this poetic meter, have become famous. A melody from among these melodies has become famous throughout the world, for a Jewish singer named (Ūfrā ḥāzā—ḥaẓẓā) sang it with a medley of Yemeni melodies on a record called 'My Heart.' This song was repeated over and over in night clubs and discotheques in Europe for a number of weeks. In reality, it is a Yemeni popular song…[114]

If a Yemeni vernacular poem were to reach the world stage, should it not have been a poem by Muṭahhar al-Iryānī, imbued with a progressive spirit and a sophisticated understanding of popular culture in its various forms? The image of this prominent poet hearing a Yemeni Jewish women's vernacular poem in a European disco demonstrates the problematic nature of the tightly argued narrative of the *ḥumaynī* tradition offered by al-Maqāliḥ.

[114] I, 347.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHABAZĪ IN TEL AVIV

Formative Yemenite Israeli Culture

Berakhah Zephira (d. 1990) was a musically gifted orphan from a Ṣanʿānī family in Jerusalem. She studied piano and music theory at the Kedma school in Jerusalem and in 1929 she traveled to Berlin to study music. There she met and soon married the brilliant Russian Jewish pianist, Naḥum Nardi (Naroditzsky) (d. 1977). From 1929, the couple began touring countries such as Germany, Poland, Egypt, Europe, and the United States, performing songs that belonged to a genre that would come to be known as "Songs of the Land of Israel." To pre-war Jewish audiences in central and eastern Europe, Zephira represented the "New Jew" that was being forged in Palestine.[1]

For European Jewish composers like Alexander U. Boskovitch (d. 1964) and Paul Ben-Ḥaim (Frankenburger) (d. 1984), who envisioned a music that fused East and West, Zephira was an important mediator and composer in her own right.[2] Max Brod writes: "Her influence was decisive in the development of that new style for which Boskovitch has coined the name 'Mediterranean.'"[3] Her Yemeni ancestry gave her an air of authority, even in such matters as Palestinian Arabic music, of which she knew little.[4]

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[1] Gila Flam, "Beracha Zephira—A Case Study of Acculturation in Israeli Song," *Asian Music* 17.2 (1986): 109–110.

[2] See Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in Jewish Community in Palestine: 1880–1948* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1995), 196; Shai Burstyn, "Some Pointers to the Oriental Element in the Nascent Hebrew Folksong," in *On Interpretation in the Arts: Interdisciplinary studies in honor of Moshe lazar*, ed. Nurit Yaari (Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2000), 259–268.

[3] Berakhah Zephira, *Kolot Rabim*, introduction.

[4] The scholar A.Z. Idelsohn also played a crucial role in such musical encounters between European classical music and the musical traditions of the Oriental Jewish communities. Zvi Keren reported seeing copies of the writer's *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies* in the homes of many Israeli composers. Zvi Keren, *Contemporary Israeli Music: Its Sources and Stylistic Development* (Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1980), 17.

After Zephira separated from Nardi, she commissioned arrangements for her songs from the top immigrant composers in the Palestine of her day, including Boskovitch, Ben-Ḥaim, Hungarian instrumentalist Oedoen Partos (d. 1977), and Marc Lavri (d. 1967), former conductor of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra. Zephira became the most popular singer among Palestinian Jews in the 1930s and 1940s.[5]

Zephira arranged a number of songs by Sālim al-Shabazī.[6] Thus, poems like Shabazī's "If The Gates of the Mighty are Locked," set to the modern arrangements of Ben-Ḥaim and Partos, allowed the musical heritage of the Yemeni Jews to become part of formative Israeli culture.[7] In addition, by adapting Shabazī's poems to a European musical style, in which a solo female singer was *de rigeur*, Zephira opened to women a poetic tradition that had been the exclusive province of males.[8]

Zephira's musical experiment had an additional consequence for the Shabazian repertoire in Israel. Zealots for the revival of the Hebrew language banned public performances in languages other than Hebrew. According to one *Ha-Arets* reporter, a 1939 Zephira-Nardi performance in Tel Aviv was shut down due to its inclusion of two Ladino numbers.[9] Against this background, the pressure on Zephira to omit the Arabic strophes in the poems she sang must have been enormous. Indeed, in the public sphere, the Shabazian corpus in Israel has been largely Hebraized for this reason.[10]

Decades later, in the 1980s, an Israeli critic breezily declared that "Yemeni song has long ago become the property of the nation as a whole."[11] Zephira's innovative fusion of Yemeni Jewish song with Euro-

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[5] Flam, "Beracha Zephira," 111; Erik Cohen and Amnon Shiloaḥ, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish oriental music in Israel," in *Ethnomusicology* 27.2 (1983): 241, 243–244, 246.

[6] Zephira learned these songs from Yeḥiel ʿAdāqī. Flam, "Beracha Zephira," 121.

[7] Shimʿon Avizemer, "ʿAl Yetsirat yehude teman bi-yisraʾel," in *Mebuʿe afikim*, ed. Yosef Daḥoaḥ-Halevi (Tel Aviv, Afikim, 1995), 30; Herbert S. Lewis, *After the Eagles Landed: The Yemenites of Israel* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 199; Erik Cohen and Amnon Shiloah, "The Dynamics of Change," 241, 244; Erik Cohen and Amnon Shiloaḥ, "Major trends of change in Jewish oriental ethnic music in Israel," *Popular Music* 5 (1985) 204.

[8] Flam, "Beracha Zephira," 119.

[9] Hirshberg, *Music in Jewish Community in Palestine*, 192–193.

[10] This is true even of such "pure" performers as the Bene Teman group of Kiryat Ono. One may still hear the Arabic sections of Shabazī's poems in liturgical contexts.

[11] Quoted in Cohen and Shiloaḥ, "The Dynamics of Change," 249n7. Non-Yemeni *mizraḥi* Israelis understandably tire of having to explain their own ethnic cultures to Askhenazi Israelis through the prism of this hybrid Yemeni-Israeli culture.

pean art music displeased some in the musical establishment and some in the Yemeni community. Jehoash Hirshberg notes that the serious interest in Oriental music that Zephira inculcated in the public had the potential to escape the sphere of influence of concert musicians and composers, regardless of their ideological support for such music. At the same time, Oriental Jews saw their treasured cultural heritage appropriated, commercialized, and changed—perhaps irrevocably.[12]

From this emotional climate, a new voice called for musical conservatism among Yemeni Jews in the 30s and 40s. Yeḥiʾel ʿAdāqī (1905–1980), a Jew from the Ḥarāz Mountains, had studied music in Ṣanʿāʾ with some of its most learned Jewish musicians.[13] In 1920s Jerusalem, he lamented Yemeni wedding singers' penchant for switching to Sephardic melodies out of embarrassment for their background.[14] So, after studying choral music at the Lemel school in Jerusalem in the late 1920s, he founded Yemeni choirs in many of the Jewish communities of Palestine. For over five decades, he recorded more than five hundred traditional songs, a small selection of which was published in the 1981 *Treasury of Yemenite Jewish Chants*. "Researchers eagerly come to him," Avigdor Herzog notes in the introduction to this work, "looking for the sounds of authentic and pure Jewish musical tradition."[15]

While he stood for musical conservatism, ʿAdāqī also represented the diffusion of Yemeni musical tradition into formative Israeli music. He taught Yemeni songs to Zephira, as well as other singers of Yemeni origin. His choir teacher, Menashe Ravina, "transcribed Yemenite songs which later became the property of everyone in Israel."[16] By transcribing Yemeni Jewish songs in Western musical notation, Uri Sharvit was forced to render these authentic pieces without intervals smaller than a half tone, and to omit "especially complicated trills or very delicate differences in tempo."[17] The canonization of the Shabazian corpus is comparable to the canonization of the *ḥumaynī* repertoire in Yemen after the Revolution.

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[12] Hirshberg, *Music in Jewish Community in Palestine*, 191.

[13] Yeḥiel ʿAdāqi and Uri Sharvit, *A Treasury of Yemenite Jewish Chants* (Jerusalem: Ha-Makhon ha-yisraʾeli le-musikah datit, 1981), 227. On ʿAdāqī see also Avner Bahat, "Masoret utrumah ishit bi-shirat teman: Yeḥiʾel ʿAdāki—ḥamishim shnot zemer temani," in *Tatslil* 10 (1979): 168–172.

[14] Ibid., 10.

[15] Ibid., preface.

[16] Ibid., preface.

[17] Ibid., 19.

Israelis' interest in Yemeni Jewish culture, which Hirschberg describes as "a blend of Romantic idealism and patronizing colonialism," was not limited to music.[18] Sarah Levi-Tanaʾi's (1911–2005) 'Inbal Dance Company, founded in 1949, drew a large number of Yemeni dancers. The company made Yemeni dances part of Israeli folk dancing and offered stylized renditions of Yemeni dances as a local equivalent of ballet.[19] In the visual arts, Boris Schatz was keenly interested in recruiting Yemeni students and teachers for his Bezalel Academy, particularly those with knowledge of the silversmith's craft.[20] Yemeni jewelry and handicrafts were soon appropriated as authentically Israeli.[21] Many of these cultural activities represented a continuing fascination with Yemeni Jews that began with First Aliyah writers in the late nineteenth century.[22]

The Yemeni and the Mizraḥi

In 1970, a number of influential Yemeni Israeli figures—including professionals, community activists, academics, and prominent rabbis like Yosef Qāfiḥ—formed a group called the "Association for the Improvement of Society and Culture." This group published a journal entitled "Springs" (*Afikim*) and became involved in many publishing projects, conferences, and other cultural activities centered on the heritage of Yemeni Jewry. Their activities coincided with broader trends within Oriental Jewish communities in Israel, such as the protests organized by groups like the Black Panthers and the rebellion against the Labor political establishment that would bring Menachem Begin to power in 1977.

In the 1970s, many Israelis began to speak openly about a "*mizraḥi*" (Oriental) culture that differed fundamentally from the culture of Israelis of European background. The culture of "Oriental music" (*muzikah*

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[18] Hirshberg, *Music in Jewish Community in Palestine*, 186.

[19] The secondary literature on Yemeni dance and the 'Inbal dance troupe is substantial. See Yehudah Ratzhaby, ed., *Ḥeker yahadut teman: Bibliyografiyah la-shanim 1988–1996* (Jerusalem: Jewish National Library, 1999), 30–31; Ratzhaby, ed., *Ḥeker yahadut teman: Bibliyografiyah le-shanim 1982–1987* (Jerusalem: Jewish National Library, 1988–1989), 22–23.

[20] Ratzhaby, *Ḥeker yahadut teman: Bibliyografiyah le-shanim 1988–1996*, 31.

[21] Lewis, *After the Eagles Landed*, 198–199; Cohen and Shiloah, "The Dynamics of Change," 246.

[22] See also Shaul Shaked, *The Shadows Within: Essays on Modern Jewish Writers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 103.

mizraḥit)—pop music that blended Western, Arabic, Greek and Turkish musical traditions, and was disseminated through inexpensive cassette tapes—burst forth in this era.

In 1974, Yemeni wedding singers Yossi Levy (Daklon), Moshe Ben Mosh, and The ʿ*Ūd* Band performed traditional songs "from Dad's house" (*mi-bet aba*) for a shop owner named Asher Reuveni who had recently gotten married. "I recorded the party on a cassette and passed it out among friends," Reuveni later told a newspaper reporter. "There were people willing to pay hundreds of lirahs for the cassette and this was in 1974, when the lirah was still a lirah." Thus, the phenomenon of Israeli Oriental music (*musikah mizraḥit*), distributed on inexpensive cassette tapes, emerged out of a Yemeni wedding party.[23] More specifically, the "Oriental music" repertoire served the needs of Yemeni wedding singers who had to play for non-Yemeni *mizraḥi* weddings. Asher Reuveni himself stood at the helm of a burgeoning recording industry.[24]

Amy Horowitz has pointed out the extent to which *mizraḥi* singers completely identified with the values and experiences of their working-class *mizraḥi* audiences. For example, they observed Jewish dietary laws and Sabbath restrictions.[25] Avihu Medinah (1948–), a prolific songwriter, occasional performer, and spokesman for "*musikah mizraḥit*," made frequent reference to Yemeni Jewry in his songs.[26] The text of one song, called "Joseph the Yemeni," follows:

> I am Joseph the Yemeni who immigrated to Israel from Yemen,
> Many years ago I arrived here,
> Now, praise God, I have a house and a garden,
> Three productive milch cows, an orchard and a little hen roost.

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[23] Mikhaʾel Oded, "Libi ba-mizraḥ," *Ha-Arets*, 25 September 1981, weekend supplement, 16–17; Amy Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit (Israeli Mediterranean Music): Cultural Boundaries and Disputed Territories" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 173.

[24] In one memorable scene in *Zohar*, a cinematic adaptation of the tragedy of Zohar Argov, Reuveni suggests a more "Israeli" surname to the singer.

[25] Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit," 190.

[26] On Avihu Medinah see Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron, "*Musica Mizrakhit*: ethnicity and class culture," in *Popular Music* 8.2 (1989): 278; Motti Regev, "*Musica mizrakhit,* Israeli Rock and National Culture in Israel," in *Popular Music* 15.3 (1996): 134; Tobi and Serri, eds., *Yalkut teman*, 148–149. His father, Aharon (b. 1917), the cantor of a Yemeni synagogue in Ḥolon, was one of Yeḥiel ʿAdāqī's sources for traditional Yemeni melodies and performed with him on the radio during the British Mandate. The fathers of the singers Avner Gadassi and Boʿaz Sharʿabī were also cantors. ʿAdāqī and Sharvit, *A Treasury*, 231; Halevi, "Ha-Demut ha-shabazit," 101.

Seven are my daughters and three are my sons,
My brides are lovely, my grooms are cedars,
And these in my hands are my grandchildren,
Picking at my hair and pulling my sidelocks.

Chorus:

For all of this I thank
The beneficent Redeemer,
Who saved me and fulfilled me,
Who remembered me and preserved me,
From any harm, also in a foreign land.[27]

This song is far from subversive; nevertheless, its Zionism is definitely not that of Ben Gurion and Labor Zionism. Joseph the Yemeni has earned his own property through the sweat of his brow. He shows no signs of willingness to share it with members of an agricultural collective. He has ten children and is therefore not a model of socialist family planning. For all of his achievements, he credits neither his own hard work nor the sound policies of the government. Praise is due only to God. He wears sidelocks. The final collocation of the song's chorus, "also in a foreign land" (*gam ba-nekhar*), is oddly equivalent. What is the "foreign land" in which God protected Joseph? Is it Yemen or Israel?

Yemeni Jews represented the vast majority of performers of the new Oriental music. For example, Zohar Argov (ʿOrkabi) (1955–1987)—the undisputed "king" of this musical genre, who, in his drug addiction and demise (suicide in a prison cell), became a paradigmatic *mizraḥi* Israeli tragedy—was Yemeni.[28] Other singers of *mizraḥi* music of Yemeni descent include Shimi Tavori (Shimshon Ṭawīlī), Jackie Makayton, and Margalit Tsanʿani.[29] Some *mizraḥi* pop musicians—notably "Daklon" (Yossi Levi)[30] and Avner Gadassi in the 1970s, and Ofrah Ḥaza, Zion Golan, and Ḥayim Moshe in the 1980s—adapted songs from the

[27] Avihu Medinah, *"Simanim shel derekh": Mi-shire avihu medinah*, cantillated by Yosef Daḥoaḥ-Halevi (Petaḥ Tikvah: A.M. Hafakot, 1994), 73.

[28] Horowitz notes that Zohar wore sidelocks until the age of 7, chewed *qāt* and ate *jaḥnūn* (a Yemeni Sabbath dish). Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit," 191.

[29] In keeping with their stereotypical role as mediators between East and West, Yemeni Jewish singers have also had successes in "mainstream" pop music (examples include Boaz Sharʿabi and Aḥinoam Nini). The *mizraḥi* Yemeni singer Ḥayim Moshe was roundly castigated by his musical constituents in the late 1980s for crossing over to record "songs of the Land of Israel." Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit," 113.

[30] Tobi and Serri, eds., *Yalkut Teman*, 68.

Shabazian repertoire to the new style of music.[31] The two broad rubrics for the composition of *mizraḥi* music are "Greek" and "Yemeni."[32] The latter involves distinctive rhythms and hand-clapping noises created by a drum machine and, above all, mellismatic voice modulation.[33] Edwin Seroussi writes:

> The resulting sound of *musika mizraḥit* fluctuates, recalling intermittently the Turkish *arabesk*, Greek *laiki*, 'rocked out' versions of traditional Yemenite Jewish tunes, and ballads in the Sanremo festival style.[34]

Singers of Yemeni origin, using the medium of *mizraḥi* music, set Shabazī's songs to the sounds of aggressive drum beats, electric bass, and amplified buzouki. Their "'rocked out' versions of traditional Yemenite Jewish tunes" implicitly challenged the appropriation of Yemeni Jewish culture, and the cultures of the Jews of the Middle East in general, by the dominant Ashkenazi culture.

ʿOfrah Ḥaza (d. 2000) presented this new approach to the Shabazian repertoire to a worldwide audience. Ḥaza, the daughter of a Yemeni Jewish wedding singer, began her career as a *mizraḥi* pop singer. In 1988, with her longtime manager Betsalel Aloni, she released an album that wedded traditional Yemeni Jewish songs, including the poetry of R. Sālim al-Shabazī, to pop music instrumentation and production values. Ḥaza appeared on the cover as a Yemeni Jewish bride. The album, "Fifty Gates of Wisdom," achieved great success. Several singles stayed at the top of the United States, United Kingdom, German, and Japanese pop charts for several weeks.[35] "Fifty Gates of Wisdom" is considered the first example of a new musical genre called "ethno-techno." (The Egyptian singer Natasha Aṭlās is the current reigning star of this style.)

Ḥaza's video musical rendition of al-Shabazī's poem, "If the Gates of the Mighty are Locked," appeared frequently on MTV, and a number of rap musicians sampled the song. Al-Shabazī's seventeenth-century

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[31] The performance of Shabazī's semi-liturgical poems and Yemeni Arabic poems (by women, for example) belong to a subgenre of Israeli Oriental music that can be translated "really authentic music" (*musikah aṣli mekori*). Some performers, like Zion Golan, do not step outside of this category in their music. Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit," 108–109.

[32] Halper, Seroussi, and Squires-Kidron, "*Musica Mizrakhit*," 136.

[33] Regev, "*Musica mizrakhit*, Israeli Rock," 278.

[34] Edwin Seroussi, "Mediterraneanism in Israeli Music: an idea and its permutations," *Music and Anthropology* 7, http://www.umbc.edu/eol/MA/index/number7/seroussi/ser_00.htm (accessed May 31, 2008).

[35] See Regev, "*Musica mizrakhit*, Israeli Rock," 282–283.

poem features prominently in the now famous song "Paid in Full (cold cut remix)" by Eric. B and Rakim from the soundtrack to Dennis Hopper's film *Colors*.

The following anecdote demonstrates the extent to which the tradition of Yemeni vernacular poetry is shared by both Yemeni Arabs and Jews of Yemeni origin. It shows the enduring popularity of a centuries-old poetic tradition among Muslim Yemenis. It also points to the popularity of Yemeni poetry within the Yemeni Jewish community in Israel. In the summer of 2005, radio stations in Ṣanʿā' gave a great deal of air time to a performer of songs in the Yemeni vernacular produced with pop music instrumentation. His lyrical songs, such as "O bird" (*yā hizālī*) and "I desire a bride from among the daughters of Yemen" (*ashtī ḥarīwah min banāt al-yaman*), were enormously popular with young Yemenis, who learned many of them and could sing them by heart. Such songs tapped the venerable tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry while at the same time satisfying the changing musical tastes of the youth. Few Yemenis are aware of the identity of this phenomenally popular singer. He is Zion Golan (1955–). A Jew of Yemeni origin who was born in Ashkelon, a small city in southern Israel, Golan has enjoyed a long career in Israel of singing traditional Yemeni Jewish songs at weddings and has made numerous recordings. He has never been to Yemen.

The Poetry of Disillusionment

The rebellion of the novelist, dramatist, and poet Aharon Almog (1931–), took a much different form than that of the performers of *mizraḥi* music.[36] Almog's poetry, like that of Yehudah Amiḥai, uses humor, irony, and surprising allusions. Formally, his poems break apart poetic forms by combining mismatched elements into strange collages.[37] This technique can be seen in the poem, "A Messiah Will Not Come From Yemen," in the 1979 collection *Hurray for Israel: Jerusalem Hilton*:

> Again, it is unfortunately,
> An everyday sight
> A group of Yemenis reclining next to a table

[36] See Mark Wagner, "The Flying Camel and the Red Heifer: Yemenite Poets in Modern Israel," in *Tema: Journal of Judaeo-Yemenite Studies* 10 (2007): 233–256.

[37] Halevi, *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 169–170.

Waiting for the messiah
And in the meantime
Saying the grace after meals
Bless
Blessing
Trilling voices, sidelocks and a beard.
Busying themselves with the Torah and the Zohar.
I am sorry, my sister.
I did not come to you from the watered spice gardens.
Grandpa's house on Ha-Ari Street has been demolished and is no more
As for father, his spirit isn't right,
I am not reliable
A messiah will not come from Yemen.

What is a pretty girl when she has no eyes
Her body is hidden and exposed
She goes out in the morning and disappears during the day
Adorning herself with jewelry that never was.
A curse on your father.
One old grandfather came
Sat next to me and cried.
What does your belly want, Mori Naḥum?
soup and ḥilbah and fatūt and clarified butter.
Praise God for the cup's pourer
Praise him who drinks it.
The man stood next to me silently
And, as the Ashkenazim say, he had no way out.
The old man cried
And said
They are working in the upper worlds inside but I
Sit outside.

ʿEzrat Aḥim Synagogue
a small and god-fearing group
wearing white prayer shawls
messengers of God.
Ordered to do his bidding
He is waiting for them
Between lamb kebabs
And piles of garbage
And bottles of Coca-Cola.[38]

The poem's speaker describes elderly Yemeni men wearily eating dinner. The truncated phrases, "bless, blessing," (*borekhu, borekh*), which are quotations from the prayer that follows the meal, suggest the ultimate

[38] Aharon Almog, *Hatsdaʿah le-yisraʾel: Hilṭon yerushalayim* (Merḥaviyah: Sifriyat poʿalim, 1979), 40.

futility of the exercise. Their world of ritualized meals, messianic expectation, prayer and study constricts the speaker. Phrases like, "my sister" and "I did not come to you from the watered spice gardens" evoke the Song of Songs and its mystical allegories. The next line amplifies this theme of kabbalistic beliefs and the speaker's alienation from them: grandfather's house is on Ha-Ari street, named after the kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi.[39] Grandfather's house and his generation are nearly gone. Something is wrong with father and, by extension, his generation.

The second part of the poem possesses a more markedly heteroglossic character. Several verses, which are indicated in italics, are in Yemeni Arabic. An old man is excluded from the house and from the lofty matters therein, joining the speaker outside. The Arabic verses suggest profanity in their earthiness, as well as alienation (as in the Arabic for "Ashkenazim"—*shīkhnez*). Another snippet of a prayer, this time over wine, seems to suggest that the profane reality outside the house has sanctity of its own. The poet's use of fragments of spoken Yemeni Arabic calls to mind the heteroglossia of Shabazian poetry and the *ḥumaynī* tradition.

The third and final section of the poem displays a tension between the sacred and the profane, all the while challenging these categories of experience. The pious, wrapped in pure white, pray inside the synagogue while God paradoxically waits outside, in the food, filth, and consumerism of a street in a modern city: "Between lamb kebabs, and piles of garbage, and bottles of Coca-Cola."

In Almog's poetry, cynicism towards Jewish religiosity coexists with a sentimental attachment to the grandfather's generation of Yemeni Jews and the 1930s and 1940s Tel Aviv of his childhood.[40] The poem, "They don't like a flying yellow camel," from the 1987 collection *Reḥov Hertzl*, demonstrates this trait:

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[39] See Yosef Halevi's comments regarding the novel *A Week in 1948* in *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 172. Yosef Halevi has pointed out that the poetic speaker in Almog's poetry can be profitably identified with the protagonist of one of his novels, *A Week in 1948*, Avshalom Tam. *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 176. Avshalom is a Yemeni Jew of the third generation in Israel who dies in a critical battle of the 1948 war. The novel explores the struggles of each succeeding generation with tradition and assimilation into Israeli society. See Anat Feinberg, "The Innocent Warrior: Aharon Almog's *One Week in 1948*," *Modern Hebrew Literature* 6.1–2 (1980–1981): 21–23; Ehud Ben-ʿEzer, "Ve-avshalom ish tam," *Maʿariv*, 28 November, 1980, 39; Yonah Baḥur, "Pirke avshalom," *Davar*, 19 December, 1980, 18.

[40] Yosef Halevi, *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 170.

We walked to Grandpa's with a basket of food
Wrapped in a white towel
Tsadok and Yarimi and Gluska and Uncle Amram were there
A thick-bellied Yemeni, respected and giving orders
With a monacle and a moustache
And Grandma was thin and pretty, leaping
Before everyone
Bringing beans and *ḥamin* and peeled green cucumbers
And the Shabbat songs, they are a story unto themselves
That will be spoken of
Hummed melodies
The likes of which you never heard.

Tel Aviv isn't a city any longer—only Allenby
At noon, a street spreading out towards King George
In August at noon
A sleepy bazaar, a flying camel, a kiosk, old books
Jumes trees
A spring in the desert.
Camel, my camel, where were you?
I know you
We used to walk together on Shabbat to Grandpa's in the Vineyard
Past Brenner's house and ʿAmrani's house
Down the stairs
A blue wooden cabin
Standing, like father said, in order to rest a little.
Father taught me Hebrew well
He always wrote me letters for the teachers
One time he wrote to the school principal: "Please treat the boy leniently."
He knew how to stand where the summer breeze blows
North westerly.
We used to stand there at noon on the way to Grandpa's
Breathing in the wind, hearing the sea
Seeing a flying camel
Yellow
Smiling
Children love a flying camel, soda pop
Red gold
Azure dunes of sky
Calm and quiet.
Here we will stand, my son, dad used to say
And he stood
And I used to stand looking at him
Feeling the north westerly wind
On a summer noonday, breathing,
Watching his shadow fall.
Father.
Many years after that the camel came at night

It woke me up without any pleasure
It scared the neighbors
A snorting camel
A camel in a shared building
Rude
Have you heard of such a thing?
Tell them that it is, all in all, a rusty toy from the Eastern market.
Little Tel Aviv. Toscanini was photographed with it.
They won't believe it
They will tell the municipality
How can they be calmed so that it can be explained.
They will say that it is a nuisance and takes up space, this odd thing,
They won't understand.
My daughter, they don't love a yellow camel
That flies.

In this poem, the flying camel represents the world of childhood, of old Tel Aviv, of Grandfather. This fantastic creature was the emblem of the Levant Fair held in Tel Aviv in 1934 and 1936 to promote local industry and commerce. The fairgrounds were designed as expressions of the Internationalist architecture that came to characterize the city. At the 1936 Levant fair, Arturo Toscanini conducted the first concert of the Palestine Philharmonic Orhestra. (Berakhah Zephira performed there as well.) The flying camel symbol appeared on stamps, postcards, and lapel pins.

In this poem, the image of the flying camel, at once Oriental and fantastically optimistic, symbolizes the speaker's childhood in a Yemeni neighborhood of Tel Aviv during the 1930s and 1940s. It also identifies a broader synthesis of Middle Eastern, European, and the modern within pre-state Zionism. This camel later comes to life to embarrass the speaker in front of his neighbors. Its time has come and gone, yet it persistently disturbs the speaker, reminding him and those around him of Yemen, a remote Arab country, and an era in Israel that no longer exists.

Within the context of the rebellious atmosphere of 1960s and 1970s Israel, Almog's rebellion resembled Amiḥai's. Each poet denied having any poetic-aesthetic ideal whatsoever.[41] Nevertheless, Almog's rebellion

[41] Yosef Halevi, *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 183–4n11; Barukh Link, "Bagruto shel meshorer: ʻIyunim be-shirato shel aharon almog," in *ʿAle siyaḥ* 24 (1986): 199–206; Lev Hakak, "'Shahinʾ le-Avraham Almog," in *Apiriyon* 3 (1984–1985): 64–66; Lev Hakak, "Estranged nightingales: On poetry written by Near Eastern Jews in Israel," in *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987): 129–152.

contained an ethnic element. He once said: "My thematics and language suckle from the Yemeni tradition and modern reality. The ability to pair them is the secret of the poetry's unique magic."[42] Aside from the echoes of Shabazian heteroglossia in a poem like "A Messiah Will not Come from Yemen," Almog's use of Yemeni Jewish poetic tradition is quite limited. For him, that tradition, like the Sabbath songs at Grandpa's house in old Tel Aviv, is romantic, dimly remembered, and tinged with alienation. This stands out clearly in one poem he wrote:

> In the laundry room some boxes that my grandmother saved remain
> I don't know why she saved them
> An old fire pan, a wooden pulley wheel
> A photograph of the High Commissioner and the *Dīwān* of the poetry
> Of Shalom Shabazī
> When I was a boy I thought that my father was saying: "Hello Shabazī."
> I didn't know to whom he was speaking.[43]

The poetry of Aharon Almog, the secular son of a Yemeni man who rejected tradition and moved out of the Yemeni neighborhood of Tel Aviv, differs sharply from that of his contemporary, Ṭuviyah Sulami (1939–), who became known as "the poet of the Hope Neighborhood" (*meshorer shkhunat ha-tikvah*). Sulami was also the son of Yemeni immigrants who arrived before the mass immigration of the 1950s.

Exploiting the dissonance between rhetoric—particularly when charged with religious significance—and reality, is a favorite strategy of Sulami's. He renders the name of the "Hope Neighborhood" ironic. In his poem, "The Yemenis had a Vineyard," he writes:

> My forefathers were loved,
> When they endured the lashing of Exile,
> My sons are not well-bred,
> They have grown fat on kingship and redemption,
>
> The Hope Neighborhood has been silenced,
> By a hope that exploded from poverty
> Hoping for housing (*shekhinah*)[44] and fraternity,
> But in its heart a feeling of Exile.[45]

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[42] Lev Hakak, *Perakim bi-sifrut yehude ha-mizraḥ bimdinat yisra'el* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985) 23. See also Yosef Halevi, *Demut udyokan ʿetsmi*, 170.

[43] *Rekviyam le-zonah: Shirim* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibuts ha-meyuḥad, 1983), 51.

[44] T: This is another example of the poet's investing the mundane with mystical symbolism.

[45] Sulamī, *ʿAd ʿalot ha-shaḥar* (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1980), 59. In the poem "My Hill," the medieval image of a cup going around leads into a pun on "Tel Aviv": "And the

Here, the nationalist ideal ("The Hope" is the title of the Israeli national anthem) and the religious longing for Zion are intertwined, suggesting disappointment on both counts. It ascribes the loss of idealism to the younger generation, who, though they have "grown fat on . . . redemption," have not shaken off Exile. The use of kabbalistic language is pronounced in his poetry. "Housing" (*shekhinah*) also means God's immanence in the sefirotic system.

The clash of metaphysical ideals and earthly reality structures the portrait of the speaker's neighborhood in the poem, "The Hidden Light":

> There is darkness on our streets
> Before night
> And only the valorous
> March through the silence
> The hidden light has disappeared
> Before dawn
> In their haste
> The workers march towards . . .[46]
> A pair of thieves turns
> Returning from pillage
> The worlds and the ideas
> Are effaced
> An upper world flows
> From below
> As if a volcano exploded in it
> The underground
> Among them are wanderers
> A quorum of kabbalists
> [From] a midnight vigil
> seeking the dawn (prayer)
> muttering the birth pangs of the Messiah
> whispering to each other
> And in the pages of the *Zohar*
> We found signs.[47]

Sulami's poetry collections are long and narrow, like the traditional *dīwān* of Shabazian poetry. His poetry demonstrates an engagement with kabbalistic themes and symbolism, a staple of Shabazī's poetry.

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cup, Goes around it continually, At the outskirts of Tel Aviv (*fa'ate tel aviv*), On my hill, The hill (*tel*) remains, Spring (*aviv*) has left." *ʿAd ʿalot*, 14.

[46] Something is missing here—It may be a misprint.

[47] Sulami, *ʿAd ʿalot*, 12.

Unlike the patriotism of the neo-tribal vernacular poets of post-Revolutionary Yemen, Sulami and other Israeli poets of Yemeni origin take issue with the state ideology. The clash between Zionist idealism, religious ideals, and the quotidian reality of Israel animates Sulami's poetry.[48] The following poem, with its ironic title of "Hebrew Labor," explores this clash:

They did not tell stories about leaky cabins
And lean and skinny sleeping children
And mother, collecting raindrops
In pails and tin boxes
And father, who still prays for abundant rain
And the cold that she drives away with lullabies
On a land that is redeemed one dunam here, another one there
Or how a Hebrew city appears
"*Temonim*"[49] from one end to the other
Father brought the bricks up to the roof
And Uncle plastered over the imperfections and fell off the scaffold
Layer by layer, all of a sudden a country will arise here
And with prayer we will bring down the Land of Israel from heaven.

Raise your voices in song, raise the concrete over your head
We will be the priests—that is the order of worship (*ʿavodah*)
With bread and olives we will be victorious in holy work
And neither stranger nor son of the Arabs shall approach
I will build and plow and also reap
And my beloved will trample, uproot, and gather
My grandmother will remove her splendid embroidered trousers
And raise the buckets on her head
Like the crown of the Land of Israel, and she will say thanks too
And Mori Dizengoff[50] will stand by and be impressed
With how the "*Temonim*" race to build the barrier
And survey the building using weekly Torah portions
By the jubilee year Tel Aviv will reach the Jordan.[51]

The phrase "Hebrew labor" refers to the Zionist desire to turn the Jew into a worker, thus freeing him from the debilitating effects of membership in the lowest ranks of the bourgeoisie. Many in the Zionist

[48] Ibid., 22.
[49] T: This word means "Yemenis." It exaggerates their pronunciation of the vowel *kamets* as an o. It is a derogatory term.
[50] "*Mori*" (my teacher) is a term used by Yemeni Jews for a learned man.
[51] Sulami, *ʿAd ʿalot*, 27.

movement thought Yemeni Jews were "natural" workers.[52] Ashkenazi Jews, by contrast, were "idealistic" workers because they *chose* manual labor.

In this poem, father's modest home improvements and prayerful supplications are the very essence of Hebrew labor, thus offering an ironic perspective on a Zionist sacred cow. The intermingling of secular Zionist motifs with religious themes recurs often in Sulami's poetry. This has the effect of drawing attention to the charged theological baggage that such terms possess. In this poem, even the everyday modern Hebrew word "work" connotes sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem. This technique, which, in effect, reclaims the religious valences of terms employed in Zionist discourse, appears in the work of all of the poets surveyed in this chapter.

In "Hebrew Labor," Sulami bases a subtle critique on the intertwining of religious themes and their secularized counterparts—nation-building and home improvement. Through this technique, the daily activities and motivating ethos of the poor Yemeni family become a normative Zionist ideology. By plastering the walls, collecting rainwater, and praying, the family fulfills the Zionist dream. The second part of the poem resembles a patriotic song, reworked according to this scheme.

The "then and now" structure, which is central to the poetry of Muḥammad al-Dhahbānī, holds an important place in the poetry of Shalom Medinah (1915–). Medinah, a silversmith and author of several novels and short stories, traveled a great deal with his father within Yemen and in neighboring countries as a child.[53] Both Sulami and Medinah focus on the disparity between the expectations of the immigrants and the reality they encountered. Medinah takes a long view, identifying a continuum of Yemeni Jewish suffering in Yemen and in Israel with the cynicism that marks wisdom literature.

The following poem, "The Messiah Disappeared," is dedicated to the memory of the poet's brother, Avraham:

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[52] Yosef Meir, *Ha-Tenuʿah ha-tsiyonit ve-yehude teman: Sheliḥut shel yavniʾeli le-teman be-or ḥadash* (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1983); Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) Chapter Four; Yehudah Nini, "Immigration and Assimilation: The Yemenite Jews," in *Jerusalem Quarterly* 21 (1981): 90–93.

[53] His travels are recounted in Shalom Medinah's *Masaʿot R. Moshe Medinah u-vanav*.

In Yemen, the cradle of my and my brother's childhood, my messiah was hidden,
Occasionally he would appear to save the people, then disappear again into sufferings,
Hidden from me for thousands of years in a little hole (*khuzqī*) in Mount Nuqum,[54]
A cave that [will] lead to Jerusalem when the End of Redemption comes.

Suddenly the God of consolation sent his angels in air squadrons,
And like the rustling of eagles' wings brought good tidings to my people with the voice of freedom,
My messiah girded himself with might and soared into the heavens,
His head garlanded with an aromatic bouquet, anointed with flowing myrrh,

In his chariot, on whisps of clouds, he shouted for joy, he sang Shabazian poetry (*shibez*),
He recited: "Awe-Inspiring Woman On The Mountain of Myrrh" and also "Attached to My Heart,"
And the scent of myrtle arose from hidden parchments,
That our fathers studied at night, while gazing towards Zion and its gardens,

The heavens quaked and writhed at the scent of their nard,
And white angels kissed him while he slept,
He dreamed: here a tribe of the righteous will be accomodated, to hold a vigil
He will burn the incense of his nard at the holy Temple and he will bless the immolation,

When he kissed the land of the fathers his dream vanished and ceased forever,
He looked right and left and all was full of foolishness:
No God, no King or Mighty One, and no value to values;
He saw a people wandering in its evil, all of them having lost their way,

He immediately wrapped his face in grief and tears flowed down his cheeks,
Did my messiah return there to hide until the end of the troubles?
Or is he still wandering, on his donkey, looking for a quorum of Jews?
Where has my messiah gone? Goodbye, my brother, my brother![55]

This poem portrays a sharp split between the messianic expectations of the immigrants, as expressed in the singing of Shabazian poetry, and the profane reality of Israel. Medinah includes an interesting Hebrew neologism in this poem, the verb *leshabez*, literally "to Shabazī." The immigrants' expectations are themselves the subject of criticism. The

[54] A mountain overlooking Ṣanʿāʾ.
[55] Shalom Medinah, *Masaʾ Yisraʾel* (Tel Aviv: Aviner, 1980), 151.

Yemeni immigrants' expectations, after all, would have been fulfilled by nothing less than the apocalypse.

In another poem, Medinah romanticizes the life of Jews in Yemen, thereby turning the Zionist narrative on its head.

> My fathers were kings, tribes of princely gentlemen!
> Living quietly among fortresses and the highest mountains in Yemen.
> On walls of marble and hewn stone, where bows and arrows lurked,
> They did not avoid their destiny—a brave nation in legions,
> Their forelocks kissing the clouds, their spirits aloft between stars,
> And, like palms among wells, frolicking in pastures of freedom.
> How is it that here my brothers were robbed at the hand of brothers and landowners…[56]

Medinah, like many other modern Hebrew poets, looks to the Hebrew Bible for inspiration. His literal and thematic references to Jonah, the tragic prophet, suggest that the poet is a suffering prophet.[57] The tone of his poetic collection, *The Burden of Israel* (*Masa' yisraʾel*), and of his *oeuvre* as a whole, approximates the pessimistic philosophies of Job, Kohelet, and wisdom literature. There is no escape from trials and suffering. In his picaresque *The Messiah from Yemen: An Allegorical Novel*, the protagonist, a messianic pretender, and his sidekick spend the night in graveyards to escape detection by the Imām's men. There, the souls of the righteous complain to the protagonist of the suffering inflicted on them by worms and by their shrewish wives, in the World to Come.

The following excerpt from the long poem, "A Letter to My Father," uses the "before and after" framework to make a gnomic statement. This semi-autobiographical poem describes the intensity of the narrator's expectations and his encounter with a brutish soldier (presumably British) who attempted to prevent him from leaving for Palestine. The soldier says:

> Where is your documentation? You have broken the law
> Get yourself back to your land! […]
> I had just realized my dream and here,
> A confining rule had been laid down to torment me?![58]

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[56] Ibid., 121.

[57] One poem, entitled "a prayer for lovers" (*tefilat ʿashukim*), expresses the poet-as-prophet theme strongly. It is clearly based on a famous poem by the medieval Andalusian Hebrew poet Shlomo b. Gabirol, "I am the man.…" Ibid., 92.

[58] Ibid., 51.

Defying the unjust law, the protagonist swims to the Land of Israel. When he arrives, he tells his father:

> In this dear homeland of mine
> Do you know, father, what happened?
> What was there was here:
> They grabbed your son by the neck
> And said to him: "Get out of here!
> Who are you and who do you know here?
> Are you Etsel, Palmaḥ, or Leḥi?"[59]
> Thus they abused me and my messiah,
> They gave me a label: "you are suspicious
> You are unwanted and unliked."

Conclusions

The House of Yemeni Jewry in Petaḥ Tikvah offers visitors a multimedia presentation on the poetry of R. Sālim al-Shabazī. While I have not seen this presentation, I can make two predictions about its content. First, the Arabic factor in Shabazī's poetry, particularly the question of his work's relationship with a Muslim literary milieu, will be dealt with perfunctorily, if at all. Second, the Zionistic theme in his poetry will be emphasized as the poet's overriding concern.

In making this statement, my intention is not to impute any sinister motives to the planners of the exhibit. One may justly lament the extent to which Zionism, in its guise as a linguistic ideology, succeeded in replacing Arabic with Hebrew among *mizraḥi* Jews. The fact that most Yemeni Israelis who belong to a living tradition of Sālim al-Shabazī's poetry are unable to read most of it reflects this problem.

An attendant problem is the now total conceptual divide between Yemeni Jewish music and Yemeni Muslim music. This also stems from multiple sources. As I demonstrated in Chapter Six, the extent to which the poetry of Yemeni Jewry drew from its Muslim context was already intensely problematic for Yemeni Jews in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Yemen. The lack of political and cultural ties between the state of Israel and Yemen must be to blame as well. Nevertheless, the idea that Yemeni Jews willfully ignored or obscured such connections to gain acceptance from Ashkenazi Israelis is not without

[59] Three pre-state Jewish militias.

merit. First person accounts describe the shame of Yemeni Jews whom Ashkenazi overseers in the citrus orchards compared to Arabs in order to insult them.[60]

The total identification between al-Shabazī and the return to Zion gave rise to a minor diplomatic storm in the early 1990s. When a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and an independent Palestine seemed inevitable, Israeli officials, at the insistence of some Yemeni Israelis, reportedly raised the possibility of physically transporting the poet-kabbalist's final resting place in Taʿizz to Israel in talks with Yemeni officials. The suggestion met with a predictably angry reaction from the Yemeni press, which, though professing to having no idea who al-Shabazī was, insisted on his staying in Yemen. (The fact that Muslim Yemenis have embraced Zion Golan's recordings as authentic, despite his never having set foot in Yemen, is an important caveat to this statement.)

One may look at the House of Yemeni Jewry's picture of al-Shabazī as a colossal disappointment of the expectations for messianic redemption that the poet represented; there would be no messiah, no upheaval, no purification or sacrifices in God's Holy Temple—only a tiny museum in an outlying town where one could visit his cherished beliefs and traditions like gravestones in a cemetary, before returning to the godless drudgery of everyday life in the environs of Tel Aviv.

Perhaps such an exhibit approximates an "official" portrait of Sālim al-Shabazī, whose neverending messianic-Zionist mission is strongly influenced by Religious Zionism. (Israel's Shabazī postage stamp, which quotes one of the poet's verses of longing for Zion in Hebrew, constitutes evidence for this official portrait.) Such a portrait is the telos of the process of revising the Shabazian corpus that began in turn-of-the-century Yemen with the *Dor Deʿah* movement. However, it captures only one dimension of the multifaceted role of this poet, and the literary heritage he represents, within modern Israel.

Within the musical sphere, the Yemeni Jewish singer Berakhah Zephira worked with European-born composers to realize the romantic ideal of a native Israeli musical style. In doing so, she placed the songs of R. Sālim al-Shabazī within the canon of "Songs of the Land of Israel." In the 1970s and 1980s, *mizraḥi* pop singers claimed these

[60] Shafir, *Land, Labor*, 120.

songs as their own ethnic heritage, a tradition whose constituents were working class *mizraḥi* Jews. In each case, the musical product was a distinctively Israeli interpretation of Yemeni Jewish poetry. This fact was not lost on Avihu Medinah, the Yemeni Israeli who argues for the full participation of *mizraḥi* pop music in the Israeli musical scene precisely because it represents a continuation of the "Songs of the Land of Israel" genre.[61]

Yemeni Jewish poetry plays numerous roles in the varied poetic output of Ṭuviyah Sulamī, Aharon Almog, and Shalom Medinah. All seem to agree that while they had physically returned to Zion, the dream of the return to Zion was paradoxically deferred. All incorporate the mysticism and messianism of this tradition in their work. All explore the fissures between mundane reality and the messianic rhetoric as deployed within religious circles and within ostensibly secular nationalism. In doing so, they offer a sardonic and multifaceted critique which usually results in the affirmation of the Zionist cause in spite of its failings. Most often, their work presents complicated and ever-changing views of Israel; it is common to find scathing attacks on the political order or sharp evaluations of cultural norms coexisting with a sense of pride, achievement, and full participation. Such contradictory positions emerge in Sulami's poems on the Hope Neighborhood, Almog's humorous nostalgia, and Medinah's gnomic panoramas.

In Aharon Almog's case, the act of writing modern Hebrew free verse is itself a form of rebellion, and its nostalgic view of the lost Paradise of 1930s–1940s Tel Aviv is essential to its romantic hue. For other poets, this nostalgia attaches to the Yemen of childhood, to an idealistic reconstruction of what Yemen may have been or what they would like it to be, and to parents or to grandparents.

The explosive and divisive issues that the poets surveyed in this chapter address in their work—Exile, Redemption, the messiah, and Zionism—are, of course, not the sole province of Yemeni Jews but of Jews in general. The political leanings of Yemeni Jewry span the entire spectrum of the far Left to the far Right. Therefore, caution should govern conclusions about their collective response to the challenge that the Jewish state posed to their Judaism. However, it is fair to say that, possessing profoundly religious backgrounds, Judaism played a central role in all of their poetry. Since their messianism and their Zionism

[61] Regev, "*Musica mizrakhit*, Israeli Rock," 278; Horowitz, "*Musika Yam Tikhonit*," 117.

were so thoroughly intertwined, the Jews who arrived in Israel from Yemen were bound to fall and fall hard.

In sum, while a visitor to the House of Yemeni Jewry may encounter the official version of the seventeenth-century kabbalistic poet R. Sālim al-Shabazī, he might hear the poet's voice and see his footsteps in less expected places: in quintessentially Israeli folk songs played in the spartan living room of a "veteran Israeli"; in the *mizraḥi* pop music on a city bus; in the linguistic heteroglossia of Aharon Almog's poem; in a German disco or an American rap song; or, as Almog said of the messiah, "between lamb kebabs, and piles of garbage, and bottles of Coca-Cola."

CONCLUSION

We are now in a better position to suggest answers to many of the questions posed by the *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jiblī in the nineteenth century about the mysteries of *ḥumaynī* poetry, as well as broader questions surrounding this exchange. Unfortunately, the first of these, the etymology of the word "*ḥumaynī*", remains unknown. I have, however, gathered together a number of plausible hypotheses on this topic (Appendix 1). Its meters are both Khalīlian and non-Khalīlian and the imprecision with which *ḥumaynī* poetry generally handles meter has given rise to confusion on this point. Such imprecision, however, has a function—the movement of the pause (*sukūn*) from hemistich to hemistich represents much of the rhythmic craft of *ḥumaynī* poetry (Appendix 2). *Ḥumaynī* poetry's inevitable musical accompaniment influenced its form as well; the three elements of the *qawmah* suite, the climax of a performance at a wedding ceremony or *qāt* chew, matched the three components of the Yemeni *muwashshaḥ*.

The distinctive form of the Yemeni *muwashshaḥ* probably developed in the course of the *samāʿ* ceremonies of Sufis during the Rasūlid period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Later anecdotes that attribute the invention of *ḥumaynī* poetry to a Rasūlid court poet, Ibn Falītah, likely attempt to finesse the Sufi origins of the genre, origins that had become religiously problematic with the advent of the anti-Sufi Qāsimī dynasty in the seventeenth century. This process of ostensibly severing the genre's links to Muslim mysticism also manifested itself in the makeover that Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Sharaf al-Dīn's personal history, and possibly his *dīwān*, were given by ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh. ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh recast Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn, an ardent Sufi, as the first Zaydī court poet, marking *ḥumaynī* poetry's transition from Lower Yemeni Sufi circles to the parlors of Highland Zaydīs. Opposition to Sufism eventually waned and, by the nineteenth century, some Zaydī poets embraced Sufism again.

Ḥumaynī poetry benefited from the wider efflorescence of literature under the Qāsimī Imāms. Qāsimī Imāms suffered from crises of legitimacy because hereditary dynastic succession conflicted with the Zaydī concept of the Imāmate. A number of eighteenth-century Imāms turned to panegyric poetry to redress this problem, most notable among them

Imām al-Mahdī "Ṣāhib al-Mawāhib." The gradual victory of Sunni-style revivalism against traditional Zaydism meant that themes that had captivated earlier generations of Yemeni poets, like the trials and tribulations of Shīʿī Imāms, past and present, no longer held sway. *Ḥumaynī* poetry, with its themes of lyricism and regional humor, benefited obliquely from this shift in poetic theme, as it represented a comparatively ecumenical *lingua franca*. Patronage of poetry extended as well to viziers, provincial governors, and other officials. Such patrons, like the Fāyiʿ brothers who served under a series of Imāms, and the two viziers, the Rājiḥi brothers, as well as a string of governors of Mocha, contributed to the flourishing of *ḥumaynī* poetry in this, its heyday.

When the Qāsimī state expanded over Lower Yemen, the Highland scholars and *ḥumaynī* poets ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī and, later, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ānisī, were sent to the rural South to serve as judges. For them, using the dialect of their subjects became a vehicle for parody. Dialect, a central characteristic of *ḥumaynī* poetry, seems always to have contained an element of ethnic humor. Like the Andalusian *muwashshaḥ*, which poked fun at the Christian serving girl with its Romance *kharja, ḥumaynī* poems sparingly used colloquial elements specific to rural areas to draw attention to the ethnicity of the musicians and servants who entertained Highland *sayyid*s and *qāḍī*s.

For a circle of poets in eighteenth-century Ṣanʿāʾ centered around ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī, linguistic code-switching was taken as the very essence of *ḥumaynī* poetry. Their compositions turned the cacophony of Arabic registers and dialects, and snippets of foreign languages, into a poetic language, thereby contributing a forgotten early chapter in the history of Arabic colloquial literature. While their poetry perpetuates the Highland aristocratic disdain found in earlier poems, this group's devotion to dialect betrays a humanistic and regional approach to the highly classicized Arabic literary tradition.

Many Yemeni literary figures saw Arabic literature as a heritage in a state of decline. Their complaints echoed those of earlier centuries: poetry was marred by overembellishment, audiences did not know a good poem when they heard one, panegyrics were insincere, and their addressees were unworthy of praise. The last complaint was given a resolutely local and theological cast by the Twelver curmudgeon Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥasanī. According to him, poetic flattery of illegitimate rulers, the "root cause" of the wider efflorescence of poetry under the Qāsimīs, was positively un-Zaydī.

The wide interest in *ḥumaynī* poetry in this period can be seen as a response to concerns over the decline of Arabic poetry in Yemen. *Ḥumaynī* poetry's sentimentality, romance, inspiration, and its simplicity of language and meter contrasted sharply with what many perceived to be the insincerity, affectation, self-consciousness, slavish adherence to meter, and tacky ornamentation of the classical *qaṣīdah* as practiced in Yemen at that time. Yemenis collected *ḥumaynī* poems in anthologies (*safāyin*) and some poets left behind entire *dīwān*s composed in this genre. These, of course, represent investments of time and money.

The concept of *hazl* prevented *ḥumaynī* poetry from threatening to eclipse classical poetry altogether. This concept, which meant both "dialect" and "humor," compounded its bad reputation for sensuality. The circle of eighteenth-century poets centered around ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī viewed *hazl* as the key to reversing literature's decline. A number of their humorous *ḥumaynī* poems lamented the sorry state of classical poetry. They also mocked *ḥumaynī* poetry's ethereal eroticism and sparing use of dialect with scatalogical compositions that made frequent and ironic reference to the rural *qaṣīdah* and other folk genres. Their poems likening poetic composition to cooking satirized *ḥumaynī* poets' and tribal bards' concept of external inspiration.

This group of poets' humorous poetry may have contributed to the devaluation of *ḥumaynī* verse among Yemeni writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For these men, "incorrect, ungrammatical language" (*laḥn*) could no longer be considered the "sweetest" aspect of *ḥumaynī* poetry, as Ibn Maʿṣūm had described it.

Ḥumaynī poetry, like Arabic poetry in general, was mainly a pursuit of educated Highland *sayyid*s and *qāḍī*s. Nevertheless, the opportunities for upward mobility through poetry that became available in the Qāsimī period were seized by craftsmen, non-Arabs, and even the mentally ill, despite the dangers of close association with the rich and powerful. The altered states offered by a number of available substances—coffee, *qāt*, and alcohol—stimulated the production of *ḥumaynī* poetry both physiologically and thematically. The refined enjoyment of such vices provided a rich topic for poetry.

An air of disapproval surrounded the musical performance of *ḥumaynī* poetry, the centerpiece of elaborate wedding ceremonies. Suspicion towards music found support in the old controversy over *samāʿ* and in the low social status of musicians, who were allowed, within the framework of a wedding, to rub shoulders with their betters. This

carefully orchestrated juxtaposition of religiously questionable music and sensual lyric poetry ritually acknowledged the tensions embodied by the marriage itself. Yemeni women explored the darker side of such tensions in their own wedding poems. These poems, composed by women for female audiences at weddings, provide a fascinating and often ironic window on the male world of the composition and appreciation of *ḥumaynī* poetry. By extension, they cast a sardonic eye on the idealized themes of Arabic love poetry.

The preserved examples of Yemeni women's wedding poetry are exclusively those of Jewish women. Jews' wedding ceremonies were almost identical to those of Muslim Yemenis, and Jewish women's wedding poems are recognized by Muslim Yemenis as reflecting a shared tradition. (The contemporary Jewish singer Shoshanah Ṭūbī received wide acclaim for her performances of such material in Yemen, where she is known as "Shamʿah.") This is because in the villages of the South, where the majority of Yemeni Jews lived, the legal and social strictures separating the two groups were less strictly observed than they were in cities like Ṣanʿāʾ.

The literary legacy of the seventeenth-century poet, geomancer, itinerant kabbalist, and possible weaver, R. Sālim al-Shabazī, reflects such close contacts. For him and for other learned and mystically-inclined Jews in Lower Yemen, the *ḥumaynī* songs emanating from the Sufis' *samāʿ* sessions or sung by neighbors at the village well called to mind weighty themes. The gaunt and sleepless lover, spurned by her beloved, was Israel in Exile. The lovely lady of such poetry personified the *Shekhinah*, the Divine immanence in Creation, and the comely youth was the Messiah. The bilingualism of the Hebrew-Arabic strophic poems named after Shabazī, the Shabazian *shirot*, offered a theological interpretation of the code-switching character of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. Such poems, performed at kabbalistic symposia and at wedding feasts, incorporated *ḥumaynī* verse as an element in poems whose themes included the soul's ascent to Paradise while the body sleeps, the Sinaitic theophany, the return to Zion, and the apocalyptic overthrow of Muslim rule.

Shabazian poetry served as a portable heritage that expressed the beliefs of Jews who relocated to urban areas of Yemen after the Mawzaʿ Exile of 1678–1679. Nevertheless, having experienced persecution and social segregation, the poems' sensual Arabic portions, their broader connection to Arabic culture, and their celebratory character, presented Jews with problems. Generations of Yemeni Jewish scholars came to terms with these problems by emphasizing that the atmosphere of

piety that should shroud the performance of such poems rendered it a sacred activity. Because of this atmosphere, which was achieved through the efforts of participants at poetic gatherings, they believed that their poetic symposia did not resemble the Arabs' celebrations or their love poems.

Shabazī himself never seems to have tired of hinting to his listeners that his poems contained symbolic language (*ramz*). Among these later generations, a theory of strict allegorical interpretation further distanced Shabazian poetry from corporeality: it did not mean what it said. This impulse also spurred scholars to write exegeses of the poetry. The most sophisticated of these, by R. Yaḥyā Qoraḥ, represents the apogee of Shabazian esotericism. His kabbalistic homilies demonstrate creative misreadings of stock literary motifs and Muslim images within the sensual imagery of Shabazian poetry, the component of the corpus that partakes of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. Yemeni Jews' symbolic interpretations of poetry can be seen as an especially hardy outgrowth of Sufis' allegorical interpretation of *ḥumaynī* poetry, which was quashed by Zaydīs in the North.

Qoraḥ also understood that the poetry he studied belonged in some way to this tradition, as his fieldwork in Muslim celebrations demonstrated. In fact, however much Yemeni rabbis decried the literal understanding of Shabazian poetry's sensual language, they seem to have recognized that it was this language, with its lyricism and accessibility to all, that made the poetry appealing. At Jewish poetic gatherings, jugs of wine intensified such theological and cultural brinkmanship, perched between the corporeal and the metaphysical, and between Arabic and Hebrew.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Jewish reformers of *Dor Deʿah* essentially called the rabbis' bluff. Their rejection of the corporeal language and sexual symbolism of kabbalah extended to Shabazian poetry. One *Dardaʿi*, Raḍāʾ Ṣārūm, is reported to have dismissed Shabazian poetry as poetry during a disputation over the validity of the *Zohar* in a Muslim Court. R. Yosef Qāfiḥ, the leader of Yemeni Jewry in Israel, sought to redeem Shabazian poetry by arguing that it articulated a philosophical ethos. This ethos matched perfectly the merger of *Dor Deʿah* with Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism in Israel that Qāfiḥ was largely responsible for effecting.

The theory, widespread in secondary sources on medieval Jewish literature, that Shabazian poetry developed from earlier Jewish forms of strophic poetry, is untenable. Shabazian poetry developed out of

contact, direct or indirect, between Sufis and kabbalists in rural Lower Yemen, probably during the late sixteenth century. Thus, the relevance of Arab *ḥumaynī* poetry to the study of Shabazian poetry is indisputable. Stepping back from strictly philological questions of influence, Shabazian poetry and the heated discussions it engendered in Yemeni Jewish society can be seen to have participated in the *ḥumaynī* tradition. The anxieties that musical performance, allegorical eroticism, and dialect sparked among Yemeni Muslims all possess parallels among Jews that provide a fuller picture of such issues.

Teleological strategies tend to undergird accounts of the *ḥumaynī* genre in either its Arab Muslim or Jewish branches written by both premodern and modern scholars. Each generation has seen its poetry (or more accurately, a slice of it) as the authentic repository of an ancient and prized tradition. I have tried to portray a *ḥumaynī* tradition that, in practice, was expansive, in a constant state of flux, and historically contingent. Many seminal changes in the history of the genre were accidental, provoking numerous "what if" questions: What would have become of *ḥumaynī* poetry if the first Qāsimī Imām had been more accomodating towards Sufism? What if the humorous dialect poetry of al-Khafanjī in the eighteenth century had succeeded in becoming the generic norm? What if the Jews had never been exiled to Mawzaʿ? What if the Jews had never emigrated?

In the twentieth century, Yemeni Muslims in Yemen and Yemeni Jews in Israel quickly subsumed the rapid social, ideological and technological changes into new teleological interpretations of the *ḥumaynī* tradition. For Muslim Yemenis, *ḥumaynī* poetry paradoxically shrugged off its dialectical onus while at the same time becoming a medium for the new concept of "popular literature." The "neo-tribal" odes of revolutionary poets, however, maintained a connection with the premodern tradition, both in its lexicon of motifs and its elite vantage point.

For Yemeni Jewish poets in Israel, Shabazian poetry represented an unadulterated cultural authenticity that the secular society threatened, as well as a nostalgic glance at messianic dreams that had not been fulfilled. Even those who sought to preserve this tradition, however, could not but be affected by Hebrew linguistic and political trends in the Jewish state. A teleological reading of Shabazian poetry as espousing a point of view identical with that of late twentieth-century Religious Zionism emerged among Yemeni Jews in Israel. However, other elements of continuity with the Shabazian tradition's Arabic elements, messianic

content, and multiglossic techniques, emerged kaleidoscopically in the poetry of Yemeni Jews in Israel.

In its broadest sense as literature, the *ḥumaynī* tradition incorporated classical Arabic poetry, the folk poetry of Yemeni tribes, and kabbalistic traditions. When one draws in the lives and historical circumstances of the authors of *ḥumaynī* poetry, the extent to which the genre tells a story of early modern Yemen becomes clear. Within this literary terrain, where no individual aspect of the tradition is visible without others being hidden, literary processes that generate meaning emerge like kabbalistic *sefirot*, among them structure, music, dialect, eroticism, and symbolism. In the twentieth century, the processes of expansion and contraction in the *ḥumaynī* tradition would accelerate rapidly.

APPENDIX ONE

THE WORD "*ḤUMAYNĪ*"

The word "*ḥumaynī*" sounds odd to Arabic-speakers, who justifiably ask its meaning. The etymology of the word is unclear. The Yemeni scholar and poet ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ writes that even Yemenis do not know what the word "*ḥumaynī*" means.[1] It often appears in contrast to "*ḥakamī*," another obscure word, as in the nineteenth-century correspondence between *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jiblī and *sayyid* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Kibsī discussed in the Introduction. There, al-Jiblī explains that "on [Jiblah] there are *ḥumaynī* verses and *ḥakamī* poems."[2]

In practice, *ḥakamī* refers to classical Arabic poetry with case inflection and *ḥumaynī* to uninflected strophic poetry. "*Ḥakamī*" becomes interchangeable with "case-inflected" (*muʿrab*), "*ḥumaynī*" with "solecistic" (*malḥūn*). The twentieth-century historian Muḥammad Zabārah looks down on *ḥumaynī* poetry. Describing the work of the famous *ḥumaynī* poet Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn ("al-Qārrah") (d. 1863/1864 or 1875/1876) Zabārah has the following to say on the poet's behalf: "most of his poetry is 'case-inflected classical poetry' (*al-ḥakamī al-muʿrab*).[3]

It has been proposed that the word *ḥakamī* might derive from "*ḥikmah*" (wisdom) in the mold of the famous *ḥadīth*: "Verily, there is certainly wisdom in poetry" (*inna min al-shiʿr la-ḥikmah*.)[4] One scholar, Muḥammad ʿAbdūh Ghānim, suggests that the Ḥakam tribe, now concentrated in the Tihāmah region of coastal Yemen, may be the source for the term *ḥakamī*.[5] The historian and poet ʿUmārah al-Ḥakamī says that the residents of the ʿUkād mountains, in Ḥakamī territory overlooking the city of Zabīd, were born speaking classical Arabic. The

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[1] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah fī l-yaman*, 11.

[2] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:88: "*fī-hā min abyāt ḥumayniyyah wa-ashʿār ḥakamiyyah*"; ʿGhānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 51.

[3] Zabārah, *Nayl al-waṭar*, 1:107; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 51.

[4] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 50.

[5] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 26n1; al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyah*, 118; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 39–40; al-Ḥajrī, *Majmūʿ buldān al-yaman*, 1:279.

people of Zabīd, on the other hand, had to study the rules of Arabic.[6] The contemporary writer Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Akwaʿ reports that an acquaintance of his, one Qāsim Nāṣir, from Jayzān in the northern Tihāmah, concurs on this point.[7]

The idea that urban life caused language to deteriorate and that linguistic purity could be found among the inhabitants of rural areas already found expression in the ninth-century writer al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bayān wa l-tabyīn* and in the numerous anecdotes about the philologist al-Aṣmaʿī's word-collecting expeditions among the desert Arabs. Since *ḥumaynī* poetry was born in the Rasūlid court in Zabīd, the hills outside the city may have made a logical stage on which to reenact this old stereotype.

Aḥmad al-Shāmī, who posits the antiquity of Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poetry, suggests that the word *ḥumaynī* was a corruption of the word *ḥimyarī*, from the name of the ancient kingdom of Ḥimyar in present-day Yemen.[8] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ offers an interpretation of the term *ḥumaynī* by referring to a passage in a treatise on non-classical poetry by Ṣāfī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī.[9] Al-Ḥillī's list of poetry includes one type that is called: "stupid [poetry]" (*al-ḥamāq*). According to al-Maqāliḥ, *ḥumaynī* is a corruption of this word.[10]

Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, an eighteenth-century Yemeni writer, notes the existence of two places in Yemen referred to as "Ḥamnān." However, he does not posit a connection between the place(s) and *ḥumaynī* poetry. He defines it as a type of *muwashshaḥ*.

In 1967, Aḥmad al-Ṣarfī, the editor of the *dīwān* of al-Dhahbānī, a modern *ḥumaynī* poet, derived the word *ḥumaynī* from "*ḥumayyā*," a word for wine.[11] The word *ḥumayyā* would seem to share in semantic meaning that is embedded in the Arabic root *ḥ.m.y.* of "heat" or "warming." The eighteenth-century poet ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAnsī uses the word *ḥumaynī* in a poem written in classical Arabic. He describes a poem sent to him thus: "a *ḥumaynī* poem reached me that nourished

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[6] ʿUmārah b. ʿAlī al-yamanī, *Taʾrīkh al-yaman al-musammā l-mufīd fī akhbār ṣanʿāʾ wa-zabīd* (Ṣanʿāʾ: al-maktabah al-yamaniyyah li l-nashr wa l-tawzīʿ, 1985), 103–104; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 50.

[7] ʿUmārah al-yamanī, *Taʾrīkh al-yaman*, 103–104n6.

[8] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 114.

[9] Ibid., 119.

[10] Al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 120–121.

[11] Al-Dhahbānī, *Anāshid thawrat al-yaman*, 9; al-Maqāliḥ, *Shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyyah*, 116–117.

me with glasses of wine" (*atatnī ḥumayniyyatun lafẓuhā / saqānī kuʾūsa l-ḥumayyā saqānī*).[12] The pun in this line would not succeed unless the connection between the word *ḥumaynī* and wine surprised the audience, thus casting doubt on the idea that the word was synonymous with bacchic delight.

It is clear from Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jiblī's letter that few, if any, learned Yemenis knew what the word *ḥumaynī* meant by the mid-nineteenth century and the mystery remains unsolved.

[12] The poem he describes was written, according to the editor of al-ʿAnsī's *dīwān*, by "Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah b. al-Imām." This is chronologically impossible as al-ʿAnsī was born sixty-six years after Ibn Sharaf al-Dīn's death. Al-ʿAnsī, *Wādī l-dūr*, 67.

APPENDIX TWO

ḤUMAYNĪ FORM, STRUCTURE, AND PROSODY

The "*ḥumaynī*" rubric encompasses two poetic forms called *mubayyat* and the *muwashshaḥ*. A separate form, called "*qaṣīdah*" or "*qaṣīd*," intersects with *ḥumaynī* poetry at various stages in the history of the genre. The *mubayyat* is the most common form. It is essentially the quatrain (*musammaṭ*) form common to other Arabic vernacular poetries.[1] Each "*bayt*", which may or may not be labeled as such, consists of four (or two) verses of equal length. Each *bayt* is structurally linked to the rest of the poem by its last verse: aaaA / bbbA / cccA / dddA or, if its constituent verses are bipartite, ab ab ab AB / cd cd cd AB / ef ef ef AB or aa aa aa AA / bb bb bb BB / cc cc cc CC.[2]

The "compound" *muwashshaḥ* is uniquely Yemeni.[3] This most common form of the Yemeni *muwashshaḥ* uses three sections, each possessing its own rules. First comes a *bayt*, usually consisting of four bipartite or, less often, simple verses. The fourth line shares its rhyme with the last lines of subsequent *abyāt*. The section following the *bayt* is called "*tawshīḥ*." This consists of three bipartite or simple lines that are usually shorter than those of the *bayt*. They have their own rhyme. The "*taqfīl*" follows the *tawshīḥ*. This section has half the lines of the *bayt*, rhymes with it and uses its meter. Thus the general pattern for a Yemeni *muwashshaḥ* with bipartite lines is: abababAB ccc ABAB / dededeAB fff ABAB.…[4]

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[1] Dafarī, "Ḥumaini poetry," 10; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 53; Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* Poetry," 233. The humorist and *ḥumaynī* poet ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī (d. 1766/1767) made reference to this affinity in a hemistich that runs "… just as *ḥumaynī* poetry is like the *mawāl*" (*kamā al-ḥumaynī mithlu shiʿr al-mawāl*). *Sulāfat al-ʿadas*, 6r. In another poem he wrote "In the month of Shawwāl I plough the *ḥumaynī*, that is—the *mawāl*" (*fī shahr shawwāl akhzaʿ ḥumaynī mawāl*). Ibid., 119r.

[2] Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* poetry," 226–227.

[3] Ghānim views a three-part strophic poem by Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk quoted in al-Ibshihī's *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf* as a possible predecessor to this form of poetry. Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 136, 217. Dafari argues that this poem could not have been written by Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk. Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 10.

[4] Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* poetry," 229–230.

The last form of Yemeni poetry relevant to this study can be designated the "rural *qaṣīdah*."[5] It may possess either monorhyme or, more commonly, a separate internal rhyme.[6] It is uninflected and uses dialect. This genre was (and is) primarily used by rural populations such as the Bedouin of eastern and southeastern Yemen and the central Arabian Peninsula, but also the settled communities of Yemen. As a primarily oral form, only relatively recent examples can be discussed. These poems, while sharing in the imagery of highbrow lyric and panegyric poetic genres, usually deal with issues of pressing concern to tribesmen and often serve as a means of communication. The rural *qaṣīdah* form seems to have been unpopular among the earliest *ḥumaynī* poets, only to be popularized with the emergence of urban poets like ʿAli b. al-Ḥasan al-Khafanjī and his circle, who in the eighteenth century wrote "literary *humaini* bedouin poems."[7] These urban poets adapted the rural *qaṣīdah* to their *ḥumaynī* repertoires. In their work these two subgenres of Yemeni vernacular poetry converged. In the modern period, poets began identifying the rural *qaṣīdah* with *ḥumaynī* poetry once again.

Ḥumaynī poetry uses both the meters of classical Arabic poetry (Khalīlian meters) and non-Khalīlian meters.[8] The latter meters led Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī to the conclusion that *ḥumaynī* poetry was synonymous with non-Khalīlian meter.[9] Of the one hundred and three poems anthologized by M.A. Ghānim, seventy used Khalīlian

[5] Flagg Miller detailed aspects of this genre, specifically the common "call and response" (*biḏ wa-jawāb*) genre in *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*. Dafari designates this form of poetry "bedouin style" due to its similarities to the Arabic oral poetry of other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, Syria and North Africa. "Ḥumaini Poetry in South Arabia," 60. This style of poetry is characteristic of eastern and southeastern Yemen, writes Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad al-Ḥārithī, and shares in the broader tradition of oral poetry on the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Ḥārithī, *Shadwu l-bawādī*, 9. Yemeni Jews referred to this, the genre least prevalent in their extant poetry, as *qaṣīd* (pl. *qiṣvad*). Taking into account the research of Flagg Miller in Yāfiʿ and its echoes in the poetry of Jews in lower Yemen, this genre's geographical range extends well beyond the desert and into settled areas.

[6] Semah, "The Poetics of *Ḥumaynī* Poetry," 226.

[7] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 282.

[8] In the context of the debate between Inter-Arab and Romance theories of Hispano-Arab strophic poetry, J. Derek Latham drew attention to *ḥumaynī* poetry's use of non-Khalīlian meters in support of the inter-Arab hypothesis in "The Prosody of an Andalusian *Muwashshah* Re-Examined," in *Arabian and Islamic Studies: Articles Presented to R.B. Serjeant on the Occasion of His Retirement from the Sir Thomas Adams Chair of Arabic at the University of Cambridge*, ed. R.L. & G.R. Smith (London and New York: Longman, 1983) 86–99.

[9] Muḥammad Murtaḍāʾ al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs* (Benghāzī: Dār Lībiyā li l-nashr wa l-tawzīʿ, 1966), 9:184.

meters.[10] *Basīṭ* is by far the most commonly used of meters, followed by *sarīʿ* and *rajaz*.[11] *Mubayyatāt* often use the meter *mustaṭīl*.[12] The following comment from a sixteenth-century writer may point to the antiquity of this Yemeni meter: "Most of the poetry of the people of al-Shiḥr, Ḥaḍramawt and the regions [extending to] Ṣaʿdah and Ṣanʿāʾ is [composed] in *mustaṭīl*."[13]

Yemeni scholars argue that *ḥumaynī* poetry's non-Khalīlian meters derived logically from the Khalilīan meters.[14] It is, nevertheless, extremely difficult to scan. Dafari points out poems that could be scanned three or even five different ways.[15] "[T]he notion that a poem can only be scanned in one way is not applicable to a considerable number of poems of specific metrical pattern" he writes.[16] In addition, the way a poem was normally performed might violate its prosody.

R.B. Serjeant locates the following metrical licenses in his study of *ḥumaynī* poetry from Ḥaḍramawt: a closed syllable containing a long vowel can be considered long or a long and a short. A syllable that ends with *hā* or *yā* may be reckoned long or short. A final *yā* can be consonantalized "*iyā*." A consonant can lose its *shadda* when necessary (e.g., "*ḥaqq*" can become "*ḥaq*" for the purposes of prosody). Nouns may acquire anaptypic vowels (e.g., "*fiʾil*" becomes "*fiʾil*"). Here, the word is scanned as short, short. The second person singular pronominal suffix can be shortened ("*kitābak*" becomes "*kitābk*"). *Sukūn* can be inserted in an imperfect verb for the sake of meter. Finally, such poems take great license in lengthening and shortening vowels.[17]

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[10] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 92.

[11] Ibid., 92. Serjeant noted that *basīṭ* is the most common meter in Arab folk poetry as a whole (*South Arabian Poetry*, 78). Ghānim argues that the slow tempo of the Ṣanʿānī suite made made the longer meters like *basīṭ* and *sarīʿ* preferable (*Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 98–99).

[12] The Yemeni *mustaṭīl* meter is: → "---/U--" in its dimeter form. Its dimeter-trimeter form is: → "---/U--//---/U--/U-." Lathem, "The Prosody of an Andalusian *Muwashshah*," 90–91; Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 345; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 93.

[13] This writer was Ibn al-Jazzāz al-Zabīdī, who wrote this in a versified treatise on rhyme and meter dated 1540 CE. *Al-Qaṣīdah al-mawsūmah bi l-ishārat al-wāfiyah bi-ʿilmay al-ʿarūḍ wa l-qāfiyah* (BL OIOC 3778), 55r; Rieu, *Supplement*, 2:628; Dafari, "Ḥumaini poetry," 131, 175n15.

[14] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 342-; Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 97–119, 153–155.

[15] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 338–339.

[16] Ibid., 337.

[17] Serjeant, *South Arabian Poetry*, 76–77. Similar conclusions were reached by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir Bā Maṭraf in his *al-Mīzān li-tibyān wa-ḍabt buḥūr al-shiʿr al-shaʿbī al-yamanī* (Aden: Dār al-Hamdānī, 1984).

Pronouncing every rhyme word in a *ḥumaynī* poem as *musakkan* could be difficult. Therefore, writes Ghānim, singers added an "appendix" (*tadhyīl*) or an "enlargement" (*isbāgh*) "to lift the burden of the *sukūn*." If these effects were not used, the last short vowel before the rhyme letter would be lengthened (e.g., what appeared on the page as "*nasnas*" would sound like "*nasnās*." The two metrical extremes of the *sukūn* and the addition of extra syllables, between which the performer of *ḥumaynī* poetry sits poised, writes Ghānim, "creates a greater rhythmic sphere within the framework of diversifying, rejuvenating, and adding complexity to the normal meters."[18]

Dafari makes a similar argument but takes it much further. He says that *ḥumaynī* poetry, as an uninflected art, possesses a rhythmic dimension which is completely unaccounted for in the Arab prosodic system. Yemeni *ḥumaynī* poets manipulated *sukūn* (internal pause) to achieve rhythmic and musical effects. He argues that the coincidence of the internal pause with the terminal pause (the end of the verse) creates a singsong effect.[19] This effect may become monotonous so the poet may either mask the internal pause, aligning it with a long vowel, or vary its position.[20] Dafari writes that the internal pause generally "varies from one line to another, and usually runs counter to the rigid metrical scheme." He concludes that "much of the vitality in *ḥumainī* is derived from the contrast between the metrical scheme of the poem and its rhythmical pattern as largely determined by the natural flow of the language" and that "how to handle such a pause, and manipulate it or shift it from one strophe to another, is a test of the *washshāḥ*'s ability."[21]

The fact that much *ḥumaynī* poetry is set to music enhances its metrical uncertainty. "The singer is not required to obey the laws of desinential inflection" (*mā ʿalā l-muṭrib an yuʿrib*) runs one Yemeni proverb.[22] In the preface to his poetic *dīwān* the contemporary *ḥumaynī* poet ʿAwnī al-ʿAjamī writes:

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[18] Ghānim, *Shiʿr al-ghināʾ al-ṣanʿānī*, 99.
[19] Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry," 303–305.
[20] Ibid., 307.
[21] Ibid., 307, 309.
[22] Jean Lambert, "'L'âne de la langue': Théorie et pratique de la métrique dans la poésie *homaynî*," *Chroniques yéménites* 11 (2003), http://cy.revues.org/document163.html (accessed May 31, 2008).

> *Ḥumaynī* poetry is not read with desinential inflection in the manner in which poetry in classical Arabic is read. Whosoever wants to pronounce it correctly must sometimes stop himself at the end of every word and must avoid pronouncing the glottal stop (*hamza*), which lies outside of vocalization.[23]

The ethnomusicologist Jean Lambert draws attention to the oddly contradictory expression "must *sometimes* stop himself at the end of *every* word". He explains that Yemenis are aware of a degree of plasticity, arbitrariness, or even absurdity, in the pronunciation and scansion of *ḥumaynī* poetry. This is shown by the description of the *sukūn* as "the donkey of the language" (*ḥimār al-lughah*).

[23] Ibid.

APPENDIX THREE

ORTHOGRAPHY AND PROSODY IN ST

The orthography of ST may shed light on its prosody. Whatever the language of composition, it uses a system of vowel markings that are written above the text. These consist of a modified version of Babylonian masoretic signs, however, they differ from the Babylonian system in several respects. Most importantly, one vowel sign which looks like *pataḥ* likely holds metrical significance. In the vast majority of instances where it occurs, this *pataḥ* seems to denote a short syllable, for example, in the second syllable of the Arabic "*al-h^{a}wānī*." I have transliterated it as a superscripted "a" when it appears, both in Arabic and in Hebrew strophes.

Shlomo Morag has discussed Yemeni Jewish poets' adherence to Khalīlian quantitative meter as interpreted by Andalusian Jewish poets.[1] While Morag is not aware of any discussions of meter among these poets or other Yemeni Jewish writers, he observes that this poetry treats the mobile *shva* as metrically short, which is the crucial element in Andalusian Jewish prosody that distinguishes between long and short syllables.

Morag also points out how Yemeni Jewish poets manipulated the pronunciation of their poems to meet the constraints of meter, notably by squeezing separate words together and suppressing vowels. In Shabazī's Hebrew strophes, this process is not difficult to observe. Examples from poems quoted in the section entitled The Shabazian Poem in Focus in Chapter Five include "*ahvat*," "*vanī*," "*ūtḥad^{a}shoh*," and "*ūvʿod*." If the *pataḥ* symbol connotes a short syllable, do the *kamets* or *kamets ḥatuf* mean long ones? Probably not. However, the first syllable of the word "*yoshīv*" is artificially lengthened with *kamets*, and it stands for *alif mamdūdah* in "*ābāyanā*."

In its Hebrew orthography, ST uses the *dagesh* sporadically. In the transliterated texts of three poems from this manuscript found in

[1] Shlomo Morag, *Mesorot ha-leshon haʿivrit ve-ha-leshon ha-aramit she-bi-fi yehude teman*, ed. Yosef Tobi (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 2001), 267–288.

Chapter Five, I have only indicated it where the manuscript uses it. Also, Hebrew words that normally have the vowel *segol* or a vocal *shva* appear in these transliterated texts without them. This is the way that they appear in the manuscript. *Ḥolem* is transliterated "ō," *kamets* as "a,"[2] *kamets ḥatuf* as "o," *tsayray* as "e," *ḥirik* as "i," and *pataḥ* as a superscript "a."

Shabazī's Arabic strophes are much more difficult to analyze, owing in part to the general difficulty of scanning *ḥumaynī* poetry. The technical aspects of Yemeni Jewish Arabic poetry have never been discussed. Dafari's description of Arab *ḥumaynī* poetry as having a rather cavalier attitude towards meter holds true for Shabazī's poetry, at least insofar as it is represented by ST.[3] A frustratingly wide range of meters may be used in a single poem. Nevertheless, while individual verses, or even hemistiches, may alternate between metrical patterns, it is quite clear that the poems use quantitative meter.

Do the Arabic strophes manipulate pronunciation, or even orthography, for metrical purposes? The answer is a qualified yes. There are examples of such manipulations: nunnation, the artificial lengthening of the final syllable of a hemistich, the lengthening of a given word (such as *mi'ā* for the preposition *ma'a*) or the lengthening of a possessive suffix (as in "*bihū*" or "*fī ʿaqlahū*"). While these improve the metrical picture, they do not make the text entirely metrically sound. It is possible that the person who performed the poem "corrected" its meter by adding short vowels, as Dafari observed in the Arab material.

The manipulation of the definite article seems to be a primary site for such activity, especially in the third poem. Its pronunciation in some cases, and elision in others, would account for a great number of metrical impossibilities in al-Shabazī's Arabic strophes.

There does not seem to be an orthographic symbol for *waṣlah* that would enable one to determine these instances from the text itself. *Shaddah*/*dagesh* is also sporadically used (Hebrew words that should contain the letter *bet* usually contain *vet* instead). While there are instances where its absence accords with the meter, as in "*al-ayām*" or

[2] In the Yemeni pronunciation of Hebrew, both forms of *kamets* would usually be pronounced o. Shlomo Morag, *Ha-ʿIvrit she-be-fi yehude teman* (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1963), 105–106.

[3] The metrical problems in the MS may be the result of a copyist's or copyists' unwitting mistakes.

"*sh^{a}rad*," suggesting that it was deliberately omitted, there are contradictory cases where it should be shown for the meter.[4]

The manuscript contains many seeming mistakes: "*min*" is always used for "*man,*" and "*ilā*" for "*allā*." Where case endings appear, they seem to be chosen at random or according to indecipherable criteria (e.g., "*li-ʿabdun*," "*fī ismuh*"). However, these probably preserve the actual pronunciation so I have left them in the poems.

Listening to the singing of such poems, the elaborate trills at the beginning and ends of each verse, as well as the quick tempo of performance, seem to give performers considerable metrical leeway. Nevertheless, I have observed the insertion of artificial vowels to meet a poem's prosodic needs and the manipulation of the definite article as circumstances demand. Further work among Yemeni Jews familiar with the singing of Shabazian poetry is certainly merited, as the available recordings largely focus on Hebrew material.

The manuscript uses two symbols to designate the parts of the *muwashshaḥ*. "*Pizmon*" (*peh zayin*) precedes what would be called the "*bayt*" in Arab *ḥumaynī* verse. A symbol that looks like the Latin letter "c" precedes the strophe's *tawshīḥ* and *taqfīl*, which are not differentiated from one another. My guess is that this is a *ṭet* for "*tawshīḥ*," although a *tav* would obviously make more sense.

Superscript designates a short syllable. Bold sections possess metrical problems that cannot be "corrected" with any of the techniques described above or whose "correction" strikes me as being exceptionally far-fetched. I have transliterated the *pataḥ* symbol as "a" and *tsayray* as "e."

Poem One

b^{u}rayq al-y^{a}man yashʿal : m^{a}ʿā dājī al-ẓ^{a}lām
w^{a}-thawwar gh^{u}yūm al-ṭal : w^{a}-ṭābat b^{a}hū[5] al-^{a}nām
n^{u}hūr al-jīnān[6] aghyal[7] : s^{a}qī al-ward wa l-m^{a}shām (manipulates definite article)

[4] Yosef Tobi believes the "~" symbol that appears in the MS to be *shaddah*. (He also disagrees with my attribution of metrical significance to the *pataḥ*-like symbol). Sometimes the "~" symbol seems to mean *shaddah* (it sits above the *bā* in "*rabbahā*"). Yet is also appears in many words where it could not signify *shaddah*, such as sitting atop a long *alif* that ends a hemistich (as in "*nūr al-ʿaqlā*"). In some cases it sits atop syllables that should be elided but it is not used consistently in this fashion. In short, it is a matter that requires further research.

[5] This may be crossed out in the MS.

[6] This should be "*jinān.*"

[7] The standard spelling is "*aghyāl.*"

tⁱfawwaḍ bⁱ-nūr awwal : wᵃ-azhī lⁱ-sharq wa-shām (here there is a *pataḥ* symbol where it should be a long metrically)

wᵃ-ṭābat buh al-athmār : ("bᵘhul-athmar" would work)
wa-l-anhār wa-l-aghmār : ("wa-al-anhār wa-al-aghmār")
wa-l-aʿsāb wa-l-azhār

wa-l-amwāj tᵃtjaljal : mᵃʿā ṭalʿat al-ghᵃyām ("wa-al-amwāj," "ṭalʿᵃtil-ghᵃyām")
wᵘ-baḥr al-kᵃram najal : **bi-l-afnān** wa-l-ṭᵃʿām ("bi-al-afnān")

ⁱlā ṭābᵃ ḍarb al-rīḥ : yᵃṭīb mandᵃbil-bᵘdhūr (I added short vowel to "ḍarb," second syllable in *mandab* and *mushreḥ* have ~. I added meter helpers to "*mandab*" and "*mushreḥ*," so this symbol may in this case denote *waslah*.)
wᵃjab lillᵃh al-tasbīḥ : wᵃ-hū mushrᵉḥul-ṣᵘdūr (here I have amended the last syllable in "*allah*" to a short in accordance with Serjeant's comments on *ḥumaynī* prosody)
wa-l-azhār ḥīn tᵃfūḥ : mᵃʿā ṭalʿᵃtil-ʿᵘdhūr ("wa-al-azhār," "ṭalʿatⁱ")
fᵃ-subḥān min afḍal : bᵃsaṭ fayḍᵃhū mᵘdām ("afᵃḍal")

wᵃ-khaṣ khalq al-insānī ("khalqᵃ l-insānī")
fᵃṣīḥ nuṭq lⁱsānī
mᵘzayyad bi-l-iḥsānī

wᵘ-fī ʿaqlᵃhū akmal : yᵃkhuṣ ḥel **wa-l-ḥᵃrām** : ("wa-al-ḥaram")
lᵃkin ḥīn akhṭā dhal ("ḥinᵃ") : tⁱṣalaq bᵃhū al-ghᵃ(added by me)rām

li-l-amlāk wa-l-aflāk : khᵃlaq yawm ṣunʿᵃhū
wᵃ-ajʿal lᵃhum idrāk : tᵘsabeḥ lⁱ-ismᵃhū
wᵘ-fī dawrᵃtun **sulāk** (should be "sūlāk"): mᵘṭīʿah lⁱ-amrᵃhū
wᵃ-dawr al-qᵃmar yaẓhal : wᵘ-fīh ʿidat al-ayyām (ʿiddᵃtil-ayyām)

wᵃ-ghāleb ʿᵃlā l-shamsī
bⁱ-nūr al-jīnān (should be "jinān") maksī
mⁱna l-haykᵃlil-qudsī (helper on "haykal" added by me)

lⁱ-kul al-ṣᵘwar jᵃmal : bⁱ-jamʿah ʿᵃlā al-tᵃmām
lⁱ-māḍī wᵘ-mustaqbal : mᵃlek mustᵃḥīṭ zⁱmām

shᵃrad ʿaqlī al-hāyem : wᵃ-ḥarak qᵃrīḥᵃtī (should be "ḥarrak")
mᵘwalaʿ bᵃqayt dāyem : mᵘhāwī lⁱ-sakrᵃtī (should be "muwallaʿ")
wᵃ-khilī bᵃqā nāyem : tᵃraknī bⁱ-wuḥshᵃtī
wᵃ-kās al-shᵃrāb awṣal : min al-sādah al-kⁱrām (should be "mⁱnal-sādah")

wᵃ-ʿindī fᵘnūn tufraq
mᵘnīrah bⁱ-kās azraq
dⁱwā al-khāṭer al-muḥrak (this should be "khāṭᵉril-muḥrak")

mᵘrabakh ʿᵃtīq muʿsal : wᵘ-min dhāqᵃhū yᵃhām (should be "mᵘrab-bakh")
wᵃ-afkārᵃhū takhjal : ⁱlā lam sⁱker wᵃ-nām

b^{i}-kās al-sh^{a}rāb yā wed : t^{u}salī li-khāṭ^{i}rī (should be "t^{u}sallī")
w^{a}-lī qalb^{i} mutrāwed : **li-l-afnān** ḥāy^{i}rī ("qalb^{i}," "li-al-afnān")
m^{u}ḥibī fa-qum ʿāwed : w^{a}-bāder bi-dāy^{i}rī ("muḥibbi")
f^{a}-lā ^{a}ẓun bak tabkhal : ʿ^{a}lā hāt^{e}fal-n^{i}ẓām (should be "lāẓun^{a} bak," "hāt^{e}fi")

l^{i}-anak s^{a}mīḥ al-kaf : (should be "annak")
ʿ^{a}lā ḥāl^{a}nā tankaf
^{i}lā rayt fajī kaf

w^{u}-min rād yatjamal : f^{a}-lā yast^{a}meʿ k^{a}lām ("wu-min rād^{i} yatjaml" would work)
dh^{a}hab khāṣ lā yaẓḥal : w^{a}-lā yalḥ^{a}ẓūh t^{u}khām ("khāṣ^{i}")

z^{a}kī ilā nafs min ʿāzam : l^{i}-ḍayfuh w^{a}-akr^{a}muh ("allā"?)
w^{a}-ahl al-f^{u}nūn jāzam : w^{u}-min zār nād^{a}muh
wa-l-abyāt t^{a}talāzam (short syllable has *ḥataf* here):
m^{a}ʿānī t^{u}lāy^{i}mah ("wa-al-abyāt,")
al-nafs lā yaʿ**jal** : ^{i}lā ṭābat al-n^{i}ʿām

C

w^{a}-yaḥmud l^{i}-khalāquh (should be "khāliquh")
m^{u}yyaser l^{i}-arzāquh (why is this spelled with two *yā*s?)
^{i}lā l-f^{u}nūn dhāquh (should be "^{i}lā al-f^{u}nūn")

w^{a}-yūṭen wa-lā yajhal : y^{a}khef rās^{a}hū m^{a}qām
b^{i}-ser al-ʿ^{u}lūm yasāl : w^{a}-lā yahsef al-ʿ^{a}wām (yahs^{e}fil-ʿ^{a}wām)

pz

y^{a}jeb li-l-ʿ^{a}wām nāmūs : m^{a}ʿā ahl ʿilm^{a}hum (should be something like "ahl^{u}")
l^{i}-an ʿaql^{a}hum maḥrūs(m?) : y^{u}ʿizzū l^{i}-ḍayf^{a}hum
m^{u}ṭiʿūn le-l-qadūs : t^{a}qiyyin bi-fiʿ^{a}lhum : (should be "l^{i}-al-qadūs")
w^{a}-qad ḥāṭ^{a}hum wa-sbal : b^{i}-faḍluh b^{i}-iqt^{i}sām

C

w^{a}-ḥeb min y^{a}ḥeb rabak: (here lack of *shadda* makes sense because of pause)
l^{i}kī yansh^{a}reḥ qalbak
w^{a}-yughfar kh^{a}ṭā dhanbak:

w^{u}-min ḥāz kibruh mal: w^{a}-nālah al-ikht^{i}ṣām: (should be "ḥāz^{a}")
w^{u}-rūḥuh f^{a}tatzalzal: bi l-aṭmāʿ wa l-ḥ^{u}ṭām ("bi-al-aṭmaʿ)

PZ

w^{a}-tam qawl^{a}na l-maḥkī: b^{i}-mā ladh maqṣ^{a}dī ("qawl^{a}na l-maḥkī")
f^{a}-jal ʿ**ālī al-mulkī**: ^{i}lāhī w^{a}-sayy^{a}dī
f^{a}-sub**ḥān min yuzkī**: l^{i}-ʿabdun m^{u}shar^{a}dī
w^{a}-ghāfer kh^{a}ṭāʾ min dhal : ^{i}lā tāb w^{a}-ist^{a}hām

wᵘ-min baʿd qawlᵃnā:
nᵘsabeḥ lⁱ-rabᵃnā
bⁱ-faḍluh yᵘghīthᵃnā:

wᵘ-fī ismuh atwᵃkal: lⁱ-anuh fᵃlā yᵃnām: (should be "annuh")
wᵘ-min iḥtᵃmal mā dhal: ʿᵃlayh ashraf al-sᵃlām[8]

Poem Two

Ahvat gᵃvarat nikhvᵃdoh : toʾīr lᵃ-ʿayn sikhlī vᵃ-raʿᵃyōnī
vanī lᵃ-yofyoh aḥmᵃdoh : kī hī bᵃ-golōtī tᵃnaḥᵃmaynī
nafshī kᵃ-tsipōr vōdᵃdoh : toqbīl vᵃ-khol layloh pᵃnay ᵃdōnī

p

kī loh mᵃlavah sar tsᵃvo
loʿlōt vᵃtay ho-ahᵃvoh
vayn ha-kᵃrūvim nitsᵃvoh

ū-thadᵃshoh gīlī vᵃ-rōv sᵃsōnī : mi-gūf ṭᵃvoʿī nifrᵃdoh :
ū-v-ʿōd ʿᵃlōt shaḥar tᵃqōmᵃmaynī

p

li l-nafsⁱ ghāyah mudrⁱkah : maʿshūqᵃhā l-ʿaql fī hᵃwāhā
bayn ad-dᵃrārī sālⁱkah : taʿlū ⁱlā al-kursī tᵃkhuṣ ʀᵃḍāhā
bi-ddīn wal-īmānᵘ mumsak-hā[9] : wal-jismᵘ fī khuṭ al-shᵃmāl bᵃlāhā
dāyeym ḥᵃyātuh mufsⁱdā : mazjī[10] l-nᵘfūs bil-jahlⁱ wal-hᵃwānī

wal-nafsᵘ taqṣud ʿilmᵃhā
tazkū wᵃ-taʿbud rabᵃhā
tashtāq ⁱlā bustānⁱhā

tanjū mⁱnal-āthāmⁱ **wal-imtiḥānī /** tarjaʿ lⁱ-dārⁱ l-ibtⁱdā
talbas lⁱ-nūr al-ʿaqlⁱ bi-l-jīnānī[11]

p

shaʾᵃlī (should be "shaʾlī") ᵃyūmotī lᵃdōd : yirtsah ʿᵃlay gōlīm shᵃ-hen
sᵃgūloh :
vayn ha-hᵃdasīm yaʿᵃmōd : yoshīv shᵃvōteynū kᵃ-va-tᵃḥiloh:
shūvī yᵃḥīdoh mi-nᵃdōd : ʿolay vᵃ-shaḥar sadᵃrī tᵃfilloh :
ʿizvī lᵃ-sifḥoh mōrᵃdoh : vi-dvar tᵃshūvoh ʿōrᵃrī hᵃmōnī:

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[8] Other versions of this poem exist—Ratzhaby, "Shire R. Shalem Shabazi," 148.
[9] Either the first syllable of "*iman*" should be shortened or short vowels should be added to "*dīn*" and "*īmān*."
[10] *majzay*?
[11] This should be "*jinānī*."

p

el ṭūv ᵃlohay tinhᵃrī :
shīroh ḥᵃdoshoh davᵃrī
yashaʿ ᵃlohīm kavᵃrī :

ulay baʿᵃt rotsōn yᵃshagavaynī : azkīr shᵃmō vayaḥᵃdoh :
ʿozī vᵃzimrotī yᵃnahᵃlaynī

p

bayyeyn rᵃḍāk yā khālⁱqī : wanʿeym ʿᵃlaynā nastᵃnīr bⁱ-faḍlak :
wanjī l-ᵃsīr al-ghārⁱqī : waʾʿīdᵃnā fī al-khayrⁱ qablᵃ nahlak:
taʿlū al-anfus tartᵃqī : wa-talḥaṣ al-īmān taḥt ẓillak :
tashtāq ⁱlā dār al-hᵘdā : dhī qad khᵘleq fī ᵃwal[12] al-zᵃmānī

p

wa-udhkur lⁱ-ʿahd ābāyᵃnā :
watem lⁱ-mā awʿadtᵃnā
narjaʿ ⁱlā bayt qudsᵃnā :

nasmaʿ lⁱ-naghm al-shīr[13] wa-l-mᵃʿānī : wakfī l-shᵃmāl al-ḥāsⁱdā :
waʿizᵃnā jamʿah minal-hᵃwānī

p

zokhroh lᵃ-dal ha-naʿᵃlov : mishalᵃḥ gom zamᵃnoh mᵃzōnō
atoh ᵃdōn ha-kol vᵃ-ov : ʿaynay kᵃmō ʿavad lᵃ-yday ᵃdōnō
rafeʾ lᵃ-lev ha-naʿᵃtsov : me-ʿōl yᵃlūd omoh wᵘ-meḥᵃrōnō
hatsel lᵃ-nafash ḥorᵃdoh : mi-vaʿᵃle ʿoloh tᵃmalᵃtenī

ḥazek ʿᵃniyyīm nidkhᵃʾīm :
mizīz kᵃvōdokh nihnᵃʾīm
tomīd bᵃfiṭḥakh qōrᵃʾīm :

qūmoh vᵃ-ʿazrotī wᵃ-amᵃtsenī
ʿamokh vᵃ-ahvoh tifqᵃdoh : ūvtsal kᵉnofayikh yᵃhā mᵃlōnī

p

yā ṣāḥᵃ balegh niyyᵃtī : shā naʿqedal-rāḥah tᵃṭīb al-arwāḥ
mā bayn aḥbār sādᵃtī : nashrab wᵃ-nathayyā bⁱ-shurb al-aqdāḥ
subḥān ḥāfeẓ ḥaywᵃtī ghāfer khᵃṭā min tāb ilayh wᵘ-samāḥ
al-mulk luh mutsarmⁱdā : rabun mᵘhaymel lā sⁱwāh thānī

faḍluh ʿᵃlaynā dāyimā :
li-l-kul bi-mulkuh ḥākimā :
bāseṭ li-arḍuh wal-sᵃmā :

[12] Here the first syllable of "*awwal*" must be short for the meter.
[13] This should be "*shīrⁱ*."

lā tanṣuruh ʿaynī wᵃ-hū yᵃrānī
uw-waḥed ismuh sājidā : wāshrab li-kāsī al-ṣāfī al-zumānī

Poem Three

ᵃyumotī bᵃ-ḥen tatsvīʾ: lᵃ-ʿam qodash sᵃgūl
bⁱ-khol shaḥrī wᵃ-gam ʿarvī: tᵃshᵃlem lī gᵃmūl
vᵃ-hīʾ qashtī vᵃ-hīʾ ḥarvī: u-voh livī gᵃʾūl
vᵃ-ḥamdotī vᵃ-ṭuv ḥalvī: bᵃ-khol yōmom nᵃhūl

c

rᵃʾītīho vᵃ-har sīnay:
vᵃ-hōsīfoh mᵃʾōr ʿaynay
vᵃ-somḥatī vᵃ-hagyōnay:

ū-vōtī ha-gᵃvūl

pz

lᵃqayt al-ʿawhᵃjī l-akhḍar: ᵃmīr al-ʿārⁱfīn (should be "ʿawhᵃjī l-akhḍar")
wᵃ-azhī al-qawm wa l-maḥaḍar: wal-amlāk ṣafifīn (should be "wa l-maḥaḍḍar," "wa-al-amlāk")
wa l-aḥruf kān hᵘnāk tunẓar: tunīr mutrādifīn (should be "wa al-aḥruf" but that doesn't solve the problem—we had this with "al-anfus" earlier)
wᵃ-mūsā kān yatnᵃẓar: wal-ashrāf wāqⁱfīn (should be "wa-al-ashrāf")

c

ghᵃshāhū nūr rūḥānī:
wᵘ-fāraq kul jismānī
wᵘ-bi-l-tawrāt aftānī:

ʿᵃlāʾ kul al-ᵘṣūl

pz

shᵃjayt al-qawl yā wⁱdī: wᵃ-jismī muḍmᵃḥel (here "qawlⁱ" and no *shaddah* in "widī" would make some sense but it has a ~ over it)
wᵃ-ṭāl al-hajr yā fiqdī: fᵃ-qahrī lā yᵃḥel
mᵃtā shā nablugh (could be "al-qanadī" or "al-hindī") : **bᵃladanā** nartᵃḥel (unclear if this is a *kamets* but if it is, that would show artificial lengthening)
wᵃ-nanẓur **janat al-khuldī**: wᵃ-kul mā nastᵃḥel

c

nᵃzūr **al-haykal al-qudsī**:
wᵃ-sulṭān muʿtᵃlī al-kursī
wᵃ-nūruh **yaqhar al-shamsī**:

b^{a}-**ayām al-q^{a}būl** (clearly a mistake—should be "ayyām" but it is still lacking a syllable)
pz

b^{a}-ḥay nafshekh ḥ^{a}vatselet: f^{a}zuray kav^{a}tsī
va-rūtsī lokh k^{a}-ayalat: ū-virkay om^{a}tsī
^{ʿa}dat qodash ^{a}shar ḥolat: b^{a}-ah^{a}votekh r^{a}tsī
t^{a}ḥī nafshī ^{a}shar jolat: v^{a}-sikhlī yō^{ʿa}tsī

c

sh^{a}voṭay ōh^{a}vī yazmīn:
^{ʿa}lū yaḥdō l^{a}-kets yomīn
v^{a}-lidvoroyv ^{ʿa}nī ma^{ʾ}mīn:

v^{a}-lo^{ʾ} esev h^{a}tūl

pz

z^{a}mānī bil-y^{a}man abṭā: b^{i}-hajrak yā m^{u}ḥeb
w^{a}-qad mā bayn^{a}nā sharṭā: b^{i}-yad mūsā k^{u}teb
^{i}lā tāb kul min akhṭā: l^{a}-hū ghufrān y^{a}jib
w^{u}-min ladh bil-q^{a}dīm yu^{ʿ}ṭā l^{a}hū kul mā ṭ^{u}leb

c

w^{a}hadhay qaṣd maṭlūbī: (should be "qaṣd^{u}")
^{a}^{ʿ}ūd kh^{a}dām li-maḥbūbī (should be "khaddām")
y^{a}ṭīb ^{ʿ}ayshī w^{u}-mashrūbī:

^{u}ṭī^{ʿ} kul mā y^{a}qūl

pz

y^{a}qūl al-mashtā^{ʾ}i al-faṣḥān: ^{a}nā ṣirtū gh^{a}rīb (should be "al-masht^{a}^{ʾ}il-faṣḥān")
kh^{a}tamt al-qawl **wa-l-alḥān**: w^{a}-ḥālī must^{a}rīb ("wa-al-alḥān")
min al-amrāḍ wa-l-amḥān: f^{a}rīd mā lī ḥ^{a}bīb ("m^{i}na l-amrād^{i}")
^{a}lāhī al-wāḥed al-subḥān: y^{u}jeb fatḥun q^{a}rīb ("alāhi l-wāḥ^{e}dil-")

c

w^{a}-abwāb al-q^{a}būl ^{ʿ}induh:
y^{a}hab kulan ^{ʿa}lā qaṣduh
w^{a}-yatnaẓar ^{ʿa}lā ^{ʿ}abduh:

yublighnā al-^{u}mūl

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